

# Hiawatha Fire & Rescue

Policy 203  
General Administration  
Fireground investigations  
02/11/04

PURPOSE: Provide a guideline for the management of fire or explosion cause and origin investigations.

SCOPE: Covers all incidents involving fire, explosion, or hazardous materials.

BACKGROUND:

Iowa State Law requires that the Fire Department determine the CAUSE and ORIGIN of all Fires. Where the cause of a fire is believed to be other than "natural" or of suspicious origin need some minimum documentation. This will assure continuity so that should it be considered "arson", proper authorities and documentation are at least in place or underway.

RESPONSIBILITY:

The person in charge shall initiate a cause and origin determination of all fires.

Each firefighter shall be conscious of any signs that the incident may be caused by unnatural causes or by deliberate act.

APPLICATION:

- 1) The Officer in Charge shall initiate a cause and origin investigation of all fires.
- 2) If possible, photograph the scene and point of origin as follows;
  - a) Photo(s) of structure or remains to show the entire layout (all sides).
  - b) Photo of the point of origin, taking as many as necessary to get a visual representation and item(s) involved.
  - c) A diagram should be drawn of the scene, indicating the point of origin.
- 3) The Incident Commander shall investigate all fire and fire related incidents. The incident commander shall assign an investigator to initiate a formal investigation into any fire where the cause can not be readily determined, or where they believe the fire may be incendiary in nature.
- 4) The following situations dictate the use of a qualified investigator.

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- a) Fire Losses over \$10,000 not including vehicle fires (See section in regards to vehicle fires).
- b) Fires where serious injuries occurred.
- c) Fires where a death has occurred.
- d) Fires where two or more separate people have losses over \$1000.

5) Incidents involving bombs or explosive incendiary devices, or the **production** of narcotics, fall under the jurisdiction of local law enforcement. It shall be the policy of HFD to cooperate with law enforcement officers in mitigation of these incidents.

6) Fire Cause and Origin determination is the responsibility of the Fire Department. During certain incidents not listed in section 6, law enforcement may erroneously assume scene control. These may include incidents where other crimes may have been committed not covered under section 5. Under these circumstances, there may not be opportunity to make an adequate determination of fire cause.

- a) In any case where the fire department is unable to determine a cause due to law enforcement intervention, the fire report shall list "UNDETERMINED".
- b) No cause provided by Law Enforcement (except for Dept. of Public Safety) is to be listed on the Fire Departments report.
- c) The IC shall document the events at the scene.
- d) The legal consequences of these actions will rest with the Police and Government administrators under these circumstances.

7) A qualified investigator is an individual who has Iowa Law Enforcement Academy certification as an Arson Investigator, or equivalent. The following are resources for qualified investigators. The IC may request, in order, investigators from these agencies.

- a) Hiawatha Fire Department personnel.
- b) State Dept. of Public Safety/Fire Marshall
- c) Cedar Rapids Fire Department

\*In any case where injury or death is involved, the State Fire Marshall SHALL be notified and requested.

\*If an investigator from an outside agency is assigned, the Chief shall assign a representative from HFD to work with that investigator.

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- 8) If the cause is incendiary in nature, the IC or the assigned HFD representative shall hold a meeting with the following present.
  - a) HFD, Lead Fire Investigator,
  - b) Local Law enforcement.
  - c) At this meeting, a determination of the direction and follow-up responsibilities shall be determined.
  
- 9) Following the meeting, The Chief or his designee shall send a memo to the Law Enforcement agency having jurisdiction:
  - a) stating the cause and origin of the fire,
  - b) and outlining any assistance that may be required.
  
- 10) Any information developed as a result of the investigation is confidential, and shall not be released. This information shall be maintained separate from the fire report.
  
- 11) Only the Chief or his designee shall make statements to the media in relation to the cause of any fire.
  
- 12) Any fire department member that makes comments or statements in regard to any fire or investigation may be subject to dismissal.