



Fire Investigators and Detectives Working to Build an Arson Case

Presented by

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for the*

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State Police Message Center

24 hr Callout #



800.842.0200



or

860.685.8190



Initial Steps

- Modes of Entry
 - Exigent Circumstances
 - Verbal Consent
 - Written Consent
 - Administrative Warrant
 - Search Warrant
- Brief observations of the scene
 - Before you speak with witnesses
 - Interviews (Should Police be Involved..?)



Rolls of a Fire and Police Investigator

- Fire Investigator
 - Origin
 - Cause
 - Document the Scene
 - Locate and Identify Witnesses
- Police Detective
 - Assist at the fire scene (if suspicious circumstances exist)
 - Conduct a Criminal Investigation
 - Interview Witnesses and possibly Interrogations
 - Apply for Search and Arrest Warrants



Conducting the Fire Investigation Role of Fire Investigator

- Get assigned the fire investigation
- Arrive at the scene and begin documenting
- Speak with the Fire Chief and Fire Fighters
- Locate and interview witnesses
- Conduct your scene investigation *
- Make a Cause Determination *



Conducting the Scene Investigation (Cont.)

- Investigate systematically from areas of least damage to those of the most
- Determine an Area of Fire Origin
- Systematic Layered Examination
- With the Area of Origin in mind, identify ignition sources
- Identify which fuel package was the first ignited



Conducting the Scene Investigation (Cont.)

- From identified ignition sources determine which are competent for the identified first fuel ignited
- Hypothesis = ignition source + fuel package
- How did they come together
- Peer Review (NFPA-921)
- Conclusion / Cause Determination



Document, Document, Document

Cause Determination

- Accidental
 - May be picked up by an Insurance Investigator or the Insurance Company may just pay the loss
 - Police aren't normally involved
- Natural – Police Aren't normally Involved
- Undetermined
 - Need to show evidence that it's believed to be Accidental or Incendiary
 - Police maybe involved
- Incendiary
 - Start of the Criminal Investigation
 - Police are involved



Conducting the Fire Investigation Role of Police (certified)


- Get assigned the fire investigation
- Observe the scene
- Interviews
- Follow-up, IMMEDIATELY...or ***SOONER***
- Police should be familiar with the scene and circumstances before they interview



The clock is ticking as soon as you are called, with each passing minute, so too slips away your chance to recover leads AND a successful outcome.


**Witness/Suspect
Interviews - Interrogations**

- When an Arson is suspected or proven, Police will locate and talk with witnesses
- When a suspect is located, Police will conduct the Interview and/or Interrogation
- Polygraph if applicable
- Physical evidence found at the scene;
 - Evidence (K-9 samples, matches, tools, vehicles, etc.)
 - DNA
 - Finger Prints



**Fatal Fires
(Police Involvement)**

- Police will help identify the victim(s)
- Police will interview and take statements of witnesses and family members
- Conduct a 24/48 hr. background on victim
- Locate building owner(s)
- If ARSON, take over the investigation as an Arson-Murder or Murder-Arson



- State Attorney Notifications

Norwich Task Force

- Collection of approximately 5 years of fires
 - No Police Involvement – Lack of follow-up.
- All case files were scrutinized for any similarities
- Fire locations were plotted on maps
- Exploited the best of Norwich Police, Norwich Fire and State Police – Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit and Eastern District Major Crime Squad resources

Norwich Task Force Results

- Task force duration -4 months
- Resulted in the re-investigation of 29 fires from 05/25/2005 to 04/24/2010
- Netted 32 separate arrests of 10 individuals. Cleared 15 total Arson Cases
- Resulted in Plea
- Ring Leader – Walker -15 Years incarceration

The Arrests

- Top row: left to right; Laura J MacDonald, James Vanech, Michael Baker, Steven LaMotte and Victoria Ercoli.
- Bottom row: left to right; Timothy J. Gahner, Hamilton Gaviitt, Ramon A. Ortiz, Kevin Walker and Keith Mutch.

143-145 Rockwell Street Fire Investigation

- Apartment of Origin –vacant
- Gypsum Missing from ceiling in the kitchen
- Non – Furnished, layered exam rules out accidental and natural causes
- Incendiary Causation
- Accelerant Detection Canine Alerts
 - Laboratory Confirmation
 - Medium Boiling Range Petroleum Distillates



143-145 Rockwell Street Police Investigation

- Intensive investigation
 - Everyday for two weeks plus to follow leads
- 3rd Floor tenant had significant drug use history
- Tenant had recently kicked out his roommate
- Bottle of charcoal lighter fluid missing from deck
- Roommate was seen walking from fire scene with a garbage bag of personal effects



143-145 Rockwell Street Police Investigation

- Lack of cooperation from those involved resulted in multiple interviews being required and a large amount of information developed
- Witness tampering
- FULL Commitment of resources of Norwich PD



143-145 Rockwell Street Investigation Results

- Out of bond at time of fire for Bank Robbery
- Serving 58 mo. sentence for Accessory to Robbery at time of arrest
- Arrest of Marwan O. Chankar:
 - Arson 1st Degree
 - Criminal Mischief 1st Degree
 - Attempted Murder



143-145 Rockwell Street
Investigation Results

- Chankar reject's 10 year Plea Deal
- Case goes to trial in October 2014
(important things learned)
- Conviction for First Degree Arson and First Degree Criminal Mischief
- NOT Guilty of Attempted Murder
- Sentencing – 17 Years



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