
S.O.P. #: TACTICAL OPERATIONS MANUAL #26

SUBJECT: REQUESTING THE POLICE ARSON UNIT

DIVISION: EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

Objective: To outline procedures for requesting the Police Arson Unit

Section 1: Request for the Police Arson Unit

A. The Incident Commander (IC) or company officer has the responsibility to make a concerted effort to determine a fire's cause **prior** to requesting the Police Arson Team by:

1. Conducting a scene examination to determine a cause.
2. Gathering initial information reported by Fire Dispatch.
3. Conferring with other officers and members on the scene.
4. Interviewing the occupant, owner, neighbors and/or possible witnesses.
5. Consulting with the police officer on the scene.

If the evidence and information gathered supports an accidental cause and there are no unusual circumstances an investigator is not required.

B. Members shall be on the alert for any unusual conditions or evidence, which may have contributed to the cause of a fire. Such conditions or evidence shall be reported to the fire ground commander as soon as possible. All unusual conditions shall be noted and evidence shall be preserved for the Police Arson Unit.

C. The Police Arson Unit shall be requested by the IC for any of the following:

1. A fire where the IC has determined it to be suspicious or incendiary.
2. A fire where the IC cannot determine a fire cause.
3. Hazard devices and explosion incidents.
 - a. Pipe bomb explosions.
 - b. Molotov Cocktails or similar devices.
 - c. Chemical reaction devices ("soda acid bombs")
4. Serious burn injuries such as:
 - a. Burns where death is imminent or likely as evaluated by on scene medical personnel.
 - b. Where there is evidence of a crime or criminal intent.
5. It is not necessary to request the Police Arson Unit for field, woods, or dumpster fires.
 - a. Where a suspect is involved, or evidence of an incendiary fire is found, a district police officer shall be requested and the information should be given to them for any follow-up investigation.

D. The Police Arson Unit will automatically be dispatched for:

1. Third alarm or greater fire incidents.
2. Fire fatalities.
3. Line of Duty Deaths (follow SOP Personnel-16).

E. The district level police officer shall be requested, whenever the Police Arson Unit has been summoned. If a police officer is already on the scene, he/she shall be informed that the Police Arson Unit has been requested.

F. Securing the scene for investigation.

1. When the Police Arson Unit has been requested, all entrances shall be guarded. Only firefighters actively involved in the fire suppression operations should be allowed to enter.
2. When a fire fatality has occurred, the fire scene should be roped off if possible.
3. Members shall make every effort to preserve evidence of possible incendiarism.
4. Do not overhaul prior to the arrival of the Police Arson Unit. Should it be necessary to move or relocate items due to the nature of the fire, their position and location shall be carefully noted.
5. Only the Police Arson Unit and delegated personnel (police, crime lab, etc.) shall be allowed to enter the premises.
6. Owners and/or occupants shall **not** be permitted to enter a fire building or area unless authorized by the Police Arson Unit.

G. When the Police Arson Unit arrives on the fire ground, he will immediately report to the IC of the fire and obtain all information that would assist in the successful pursuance of the investigation.

H. Once the fire has been called under control and is presumed out by the IC, if the investigation is still in progress, the Police Arson Unit on the scene shall assume supervision of and responsibility for the fire scene. When their investigation has been completed, they will relinquish their supervision of the fire area to the IC. If, however, the fire begins to again propagate, supervision and responsibility will immediately revert back to the current IC.

Section 2: Removal of a Fire Victim

A. If a victim is discovered in the course of firefighting operations, member actions shall be guided by the following:

1. The IC shall immediately contact Fire Dispatch and request the Police Arson Unit stating a fatality has been discovered.
2. If members are unable to determine that the victim is alive or dead, the members shall take notice of the victim's position and location and remove the victim to a safe area where emergency medical procedures may begin.
3. If members discover a victim in a fire area where there is no doubt that the victim is deceased, members shall take the following actions:
 - a. When the body is not in danger of being consumed by the fire, and does not pose a direct hindrance to suppression, members shall not disturb the position of the body. The fire IC shall be immediately notified of the body.
 - b. If the possibility exists that the fire would consume the body, or it is deemed a hindrance, members shall note all details concerning the position of the body and its surroundings. Individual members should attempt to obtain a witness, and then remove the body only as far as is necessary to protect it from further damage.

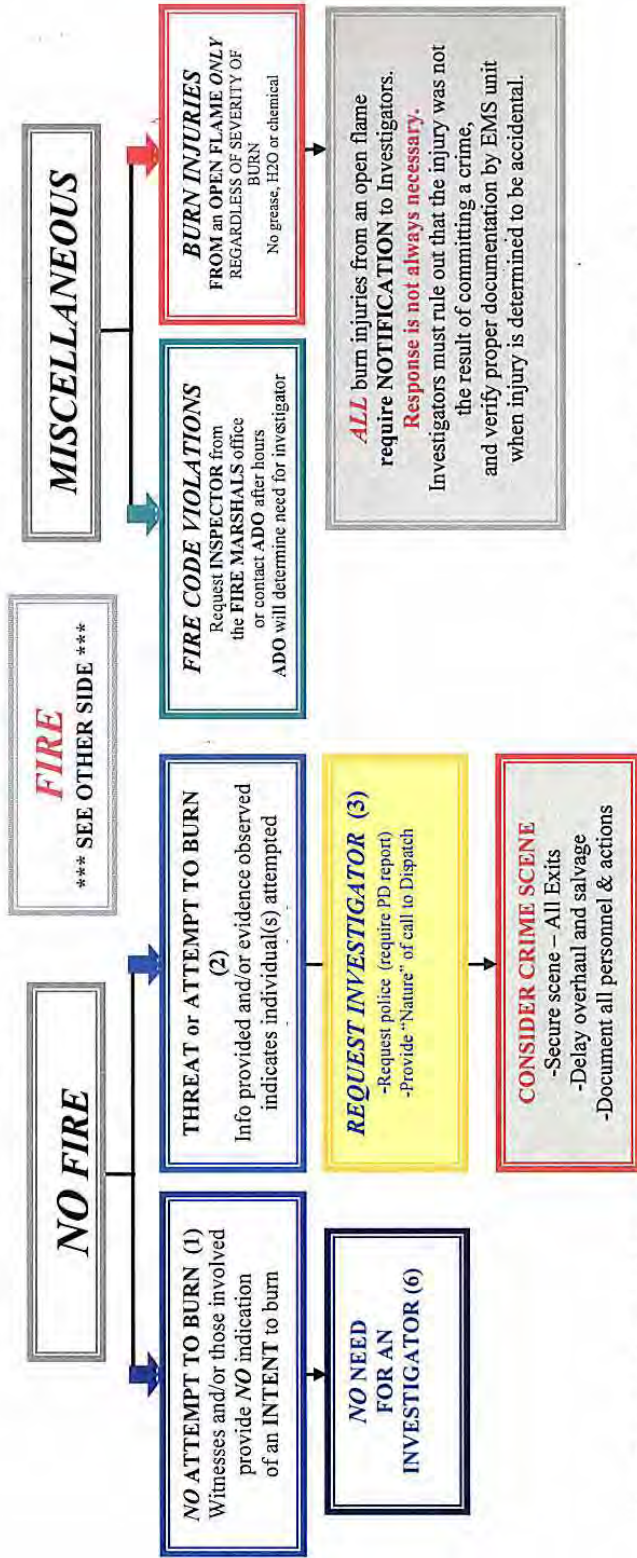
Section 3: NFIRS

A. When the Police Arson Unit is requested it will be the first in company officers responsibility to fill out the Arson/Investigation section of the NFIRS report. The company officer will need to contact the Police Arson Unit to obtain the needed information to complete this section.

Section 4: Flow Charts for Requesting the Police Arson Unit.

- A. A copy shall be located in the front of every major piece of suppression apparatus.
- B. The charts shall be used when questions arise as to when to request the Police Arson Unit.

DO I NEED A FIRE INVESTIGATOR?



(1) - The issue of *intent* is the key in determining if a crime occurred. EXAMPLE: *Any flammable liquid, or cigarette is found on the ground next to a structure*. If it was spilled or dropped accidentally, then there is NO INTENT, however, if it was intentionally poured or placed in preparation to burn, then the intent to burn completes the crime.

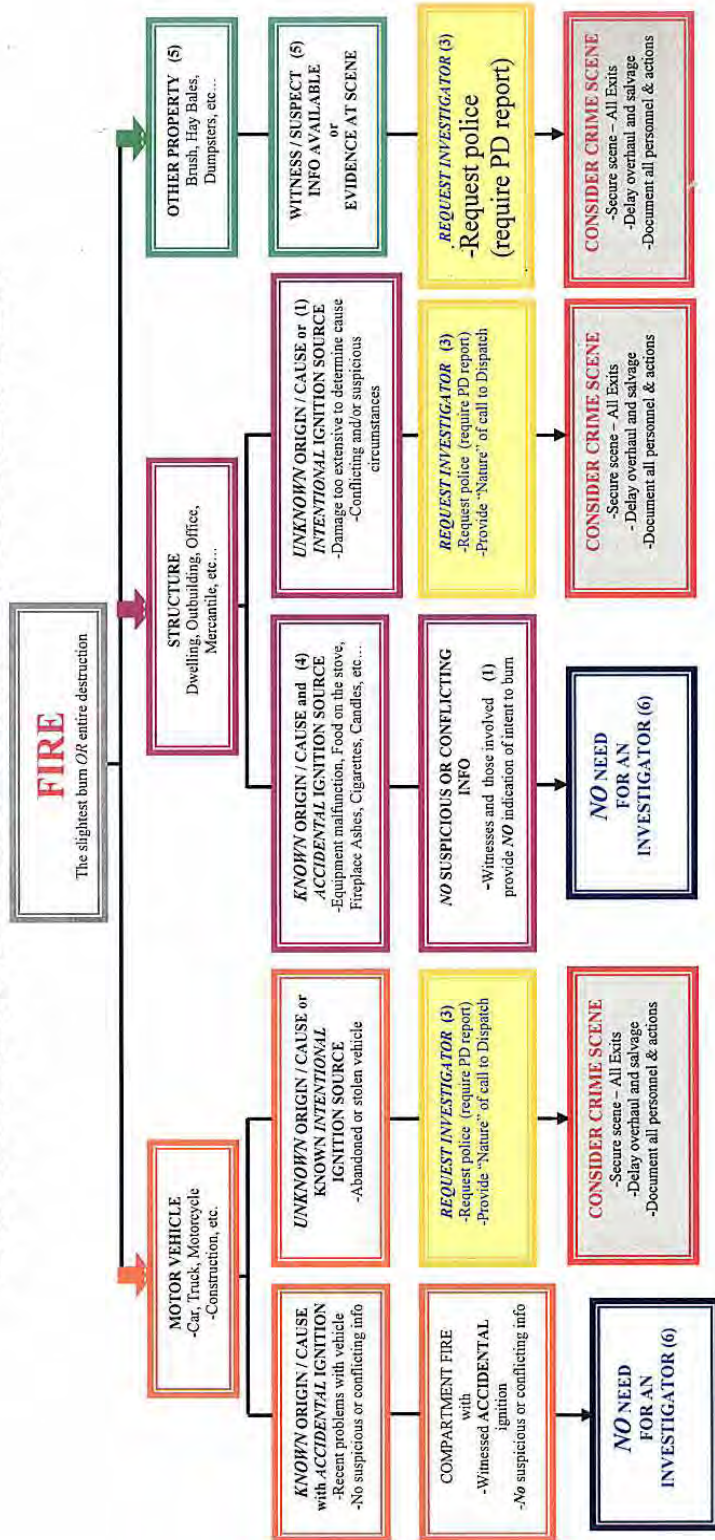
(2) - As indicated in (1), if you find evidence of accelerants with "intent", OR you are provided information that someone has THREATENED to burn, then a potential crime was committed.

(3) - Just as you would provide Dispatch the "nature" of your request for a Medic Unit, please provide the nature of your request for an Investigator. This will assist in expediting the appropriate resources. EXAMPLE: *

A suspect is on the scene - We have immediate access to all the police channels, and can request a nearby officer to detain the suspect until our arrival.

A fire to a business OR a strong odor of gasoline - We can request the response of other agencies immediately, i.e....ATF, Accelerant K-9 Team... Additionally, be aware that Investigators are often in court, at the jail, or conducting interviews, and are not always immediately free to "respond". Knowing details of the incident will allow Investigators to assess the necessary information and determine how best to triage their activities, OR to call out another Investigator to assist.

DO I NEED A FIRE INVESTIGATOR?



(4) - Some people believe Investigators must be called out to document equipment failures, or for potential civil matters. However, Investigators document failed Equipment, etc... the same as field personnel, making a call out unnecessary.

IF YOU KNOW THE CAUSE TO BE ACCIDENTAL - THERE IS NO NEED TO CALL OUT AN INVESTIGATOR TO CONFIRM.

(5) - It is often difficult to rule out an accidental ignition source as the cause for those types of fires, making a response by an Investigator (usually) unnecessary.

(6) - This is only a guide, and should not be interpreted as an "absolute". If you have any doubts, or questions, call or consult with an Investigator.