Grant County Fire Protection District 3

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

TACTICAL ACTION GUIDELINES

1. NUMBER: 9.4.1

2. SUBJECT: ***Fire Investigations***

3. POLICY: It is the Policy of Grant County Fire District 3 to assure that the cause and origin of fires is determined in an effective and efficient manner. This Fire District will cooperate, as necessary, with the County Fire Marshal, the Washington State Fire Marshal, and local, state and federal law enforcement authorities.

4. SCOPE: This Policy and Procedure is applicable to all personnel of Grant County Fire District 3.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES:

   A. The District Fire Chief is responsible for ensuring that this Policy and Procedure is followed.

   B. The Incident Commander is responsible for initiating this Policy and Procedure as appropriate.

6. PROCEDURE:

   A. All fire crews shall take appropriate action to preserve evidence and clues pertaining to the cause and origin of fires during extinguishment and overhaul procedures.

   B. The area of origin shall be identified as soon as possible by the Officer in Charge at the scene. This area, identified by yellow surveyors' tape, shall be off limits to all personnel except those necessary to control fire spread and to investigate the cause.

   C. A fire investigator for this District shall be called in the following circumstances:

      1. Fire Death
      2. A civilian or firefighter is seriously injured or dies as a result of the fire
      3. Known Arson
      4. Suspicious origin
      5. Undetermined origin
      6. Unusual circumstances surround the fire (multiple small fires, missing property, etc.)
      7. Explosion

8. Dollar loss in excess of $50,000.00
9. Other situations in which the Incident Commander determines an investigation is required.

D. Any time a fire investigator is called for, the Duty Chief of the District shall be notified.

E. All personnel shall cooperate with the Fire Investigator in conducting his or her investigation.

F. The overall coordination of the investigation procedure shall lie with the Fire Marshal's Office or the senior fire officer. Assistance may be sought from the sheriff's office, F.B.I., U.S. Product Safety Commission, Insurance Company, other investigators or other experts as appropriate.

G. During response to the fire scene, any persons or vehicles leaving the scene should be noted, including a license number and/or physical description.

H. At the fire scene, the following observations should be noted:

1. The color, amount and location of both fire and/or smoke.
2. The presence of any unusual odors such as gasoline, etc.
3. The security of the involved structure or vehicle such as: locked or unlocked; doors and/or windows opened or closed; type of entry (forced or otherwise); identity of persons present and their reactions (obtain name, address, phone number, date of birth, physical description, clothing description, description of transportation, including license number).

I. If a fire investigator will be requested, the use of water and overhaul activity should be limited to fire suppression practices. The fire scene should not be altered more than necessary in extinguishment.

J. Significant evidence should not be moved unless necessary for the preservation of the evidence or for suppression of the fire. The evidence should not be moved until the investigation unit has arrived and taken custody. Such protection enables the investigator to observe, evaluate, and record the evidence while in its original location, and creates a "chain of custody" necessary to be able to enter the item into evidence in court. The location and condition of a deceased fire victim can often be of critical importance to both the fire investigator and the coroner.

K. When an investigator has been requested, firefighters and bystanders should be restricted from the immediate fire area. Only those directly involved with the fire investigation team should be permitted to enter or to remove any items from the fire scene.

L. At least two Fire District personnel shall be required to remain at the fire scene until the fire investigation unit arrives.

M. Suspects should not be questioned other than to obtain basic identity information. The fire investigation unit should interview any possible suspects. Any free and spontaneous statements by suspects shall be noted. The investigator should be advised of the statements the suspect made or the behaviors he/she exhibited.

N. When the investigator arrives at the scene, further activities involving salvage, overhaul, removal of belongings and entrance by occupants must be cleared with the senior investigator.