

Monterey County Fire Chiefs Association
FIRE OPERATIONS MANUAL
Section 6
for the
MONTEREY COUNTY FIRE & ARSON TASK FORCE

FIRE INVESTIGATOR REQUEST PROCEDURES

GOAL: The goal of this policy is to establish a procedure for the fire service Incident Commander to request a mutual aid fire investigator(s) to assist in determining the origin and cause of a fire.

DISCUSSION:

1. The primary mission of the Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force is to assist agencies in investigating unique, large, or otherwise challenging problems and/or incidents. Most fire agencies have a designated person or persons in the department who is responsible for determining the origin and cause of fires occurring within that fire agency's jurisdiction. However, at times, this person may not be available to the Incident Commander for an investigation. For these times, the Monterey County Fire Chiefs have included fire investigators in the Monterey County Fire Mutual Aid System. However, it is important to note, it is not the intent of the Monterey County Fire Chief's Association that the Arson Task Force serve as the sole investigative resource for a fire agency.
2. Other resources may include assistance from the CDF / State Fire Marshal's Office Arson / Bomb Unit, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, & Firearms, or any other public or private investigative resource. Also, many fire agencies have arrangements and agreements with neighboring fire departments or law enforcement agencies and personnel to lend routine investigative assistance.
3. The Incident Commander requests a mutual aid fire investigator through FireComm dispatch. To obtain the mutual aid fire investigator, FireComm will consult the Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force Rotational Investigator Call-Out List. The Rotational List has been developed as a method to locate and dispatch a qualified fire investigator to the scene of the incident in a timely fashion.
4. Typically, the mutual aid fire investigator will assist the requesting department in the initiation of a preliminary fire origin and cause determination. All necessary scene support equipment and staffing requirements will be provided by the requesting department. This assistance or support may include and is not limited to scene security, personnel for scene examination, lighting equipment, or any other supplies or support as needed to conduct the cause and origin investigation. If at any time arson or any other crime is suspected, the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction will be contacted for assistance.
5. As soon as possible, the mutual aid fire investigator will be relieved by the requesting department's own fire investigator. Standardized field notes and report forms will be used by the mutual aid fire investigator to support this transition.

REQUEST PROCEDURES:

1. The Incident Commander at the fire scene determines the need for a fire investigator. The IC's first choice should be from within the department. If a fire investigator is not available from within the department, or if additional investigators are needed, the IC may request a mutual aid fire investigator(s) through the Monterey County Fire Mutual Aid System.
2. The Incident Commander may wish to request a specific fire investigator by name. This type of request will typically not go through the Fire Investigator Rotational Call-Out List. The Incident Commander shall make the name request to the responsible Communication Center who will then forward the request to the name requested employee's agency for action.
3. To initiate the request for a fire investigator from the Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force Rotational Call-Out List, the Incident Commander will contact FireComm by radio or by phone and request a mutual aid fire investigator, or investigators, from the Fire and Arson Task Force.
4. FireComm will consult the Fire Investigator Rotational Call-Out List located in the Monterey County Fire Mutual Aid binder. This Rotational List will contain the names of fire investigators authorized by the Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force as mutual aid investigators and the approved method for making contact.
5. Individuals not listed on the Rotational List will not be requested as a mutual aid Investigator as part of the Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force. It is the responsibility of the current Director of the Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force to provide FireComm with an up-to-date list of authorized mutual fire investigators.
6. FireComm will contact the first fire investigator from the list and direct this person to call FireComm for an assignment. If after five (5) minutes there is no response, FireComm will contact the second fire investigator listed. This will continue until one of the fire investigators contacts FireComm.
7. If no investigators are available from the list, then the Firecomm dispatcher will notify the requesting Incident Commander that the list has been exhausted and that a call-out investigator from the Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force is not available.
8. Once a fire investigator is located and accepts the assignment, the FireComm dispatcher will brief the mutual aid fire investigator on the incident and assignment and will get an estimated time of arrival (ETA) to the fire scene. The mutual aid fire investigator's name, radio call sign, and ETA will then be transferred to the Incident Commander. FireComm will need to provide the following information to the mutual aid fire investigator:
 - A. Location of Incident. *(To include street address and Thomas Brothers coordinates.)*
 - B. Type of Incident. *(Such as residential, commercial, wildland, vehicle fires, or explosion, bombing, haz mat, etc.)*
 - C. Incident Command Post Location.
 - D. Command Radio Frequency.
 - E. Special Hazards, Considerations, or Requests.

SCENE INVESTIGATIVE PROCEDURES:

1. It is the responsibility of the requesting fire agency and the expectation of the responding mutual aid fire investigator that the fire scene will be rendered safe and secure. Any current or suspected criminal, explosive, hazardous materials, or other hazardous condition will be addressed by the requesting fire agency, local law enforcement or other appropriate agencies prior to the arrival of the mutual aid fire investigator.
2. The mutual aid fire investigator will proceed to the fire scene and be prepared to help direct the fire origin and cause investigation. The mutual aid fire investigator will meet face-to-face with the Incident Commander and get a briefing on the fire. The mutual aid fire investigator will then develop an action plan to accomplish the task, including a list of staffing requirements, equipment needs, and any other specific needs to aid in the investigation. This action plan will be approved by the on-scene Incident Commander.
3. In some situations, and by arrangement with the mutual aid fire investigator, the entire fire origin and cause determination, or follow-up investigation, will be conducted and concluded by the mutual aid fire investigator. In most cases, the mutual aid fire investigator will be relieved as soon as possible by the requesting department's own investigator.
4. It is recommended that the mutual aid fire investigator use a standard method of fire investigation documentation to include:
 - A. Consent to Search Form
 - B. NFPA 906 – Fire Incident Field Notes
 - C. Case Report Writing Manual
 - D. 35mm Photography or Digital Photography
 - E. Video Photography if available
 - F. Audio Tape Narrative
5. At the conclusion of the fire cause determination, or when relieved, the mutual aid fire investigator will meet with the Incident Commander and provide a briefing on the preliminary findings. Some fire investigations may be simple and straightforward with no necessary follow-up required. However, some fire investigations may be complex, with additional fire scene evaluation, witness interviews, lab test results, or other follow-up required.
6. An extended action plan will be proposed to the Incident Commander outlining fire scene security, evidence collecting procedures, and any other special considerations. As with any mutual aid resource, every effort should be made to clear and return the mutual aid fire investigator as soon as possible.
7. If requested by the Incident Commander, the mutual aid fire investigator will prepare a written report to include the actions and findings of the mutual aid investigator. Once prepared, the written report will be submitted to the requesting Incident Commander.
8. When the mutual aid investigator has completed the assignment, the investigator will provide the current Director of the Monterey County Fire / Arson Task Force a brief summary of the incident by either telephone, fax, memorandum, or e-mail in a timely fashion.