



Fire investigation competency framework

Introduction

Effective fire investigations depend on the knowledge & understanding, competency and experience of practitioners who carry out the scene examination. Fire scene investigation is a challenging and evolving role where continued learning and practice is necessary to develop, maintain and evidence professional competency. It is therefore essential that public and private sector agencies agree to minimum levels of competency to be achieved by all personnel performing the role at each relevant tier of investigation. This document is intended to guide Fire & Rescue Services to achieve a standardised training and competency framework.

Scope

This guidance has been developed for organisations requiring their staff to undertake Fire Investigations anywhere within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Previously, investigations have been split into three separate levels, however it is felt that whilst the competencies required for the first level are different, the competencies required for the second and third level are actually the same. The only real difference being that the third level tended to be a multi-agency investigation. This document splits the competency requirements up into Tier 1 (previously referred to as “Level 1”) and Tier 2 (previously referred to as “Level 2 and Level 3” fire scene Investigations). It clarifies the definition of the two different tiers of investigation and provides guidance as to what level of competency is required for each of them. Whilst this document identifies the competency required for Tier 1 and 2 investigators based on the Skills for Justice assessment criteria for Fire Investigation, or an equivalent standard, it is not the intention to state that FRS must accredit the training that has been provided to its investigators.

Guidance on appropriate levels of competency

Tier 1 fire scene investigations can be defined as a routine fire investigation and are usually undertaken to provide information required by the Secretary of State, through the national Incident Recording System, by practitioners initially attending the fire scene. In most cases that will be Fire & Rescue Service Incident Commanders, normally at Crew or Watch Manager level. Personnel undertaking such fire scene investigations should receive a level of fire investigation awareness training which enables them to accurately complete the IRS. This training will also assist those investigators to identify when the investigation is beyond their level of expertise and to summon the support of investigators trained to carry out a Tier 2 investigation.

Personnel performing Tier 1 fire scene investigations should be trained and competent to a level equivalent to meet all of the Skills for Justice Level 2 Introduction to Fire Investigation assessment criteria.

Tier 2 fire scene investigations are defined as complex fire and/or explosion incidents (non-terrorist) where the origin and cause is not easily established. Non-suspicious or non-crime related scene investigations may be carried out solely by FRS investigators.

In the case of fires and/or explosions involving fatal or serious injury, fires of interest determined by the organisation or those of a suspicious nature with the potential to enter the criminal justice system, a collaborative multi-agency team approach should be adopted. In such cases the team will be led by the Police Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) supported by some or all of the following:

- The Forensic Science Service Provider
- Forensic Scientists from the private sector
- Fire and Rescue Service Personnel
- Nominated Police Officers/Crime Scene Managers including Murder / Major Crime Team
- Fire Investigators appointed on behalf of the Insurers.
- Specialist contractors required to perform a particular task/role.
- Coroners

These should be investigated by a competent Tier 2 Fire Scene Investigator with specific training and experience to undertake a more detailed or extensive fire scene investigation than required for Tier 1 investigations.

FSI's carrying out Tier 2 Investigations should be trained and competent to a level equivalent to meet all of the Skills for Justice Level 5 Certificate in Fire Investigation assessment criteria and be working to the standards prescribed within the 'Code of Practice for Fire Investigators within the Criminal Justice System in the UK'.

Each individual organisation is responsible for determining whether or not they differentiate between Fire Scene Investigators that would carry out single-agency or multi-agency investigations, for establishing their Fire Scene Investigator development pathway and their maintenance of competency strategy.