# White Mountain Apache



**Fire & Rescue Department**

**Adopted 06/06/2012**

**Emergency Procedures**

**SOP 760.02 FIRE INVESTIGATIONS**

1. **Purpose**
   1. The purpose of this procedure is to establish guidelines for the investigation of fires within the jurisdiction of the White Mountain Apache Fire & Rescue Department.
2. **Scope**
   1. This policy applies to all operational personnel.
3. **Procedure**
   1. A fire investigator shall be requested in any of the following circumstances, or if any of the following circumstances are believed to exist:
      1. Fire fatality or serious fire injury
      2. Fires wherein the cause cannot be determined by the officer in charge
      3. When the nature of the fire is believed to be incendiary
      4. Fires that cause a significant amount of property damage
      5. Situations in which serious code violations significantly contributed to the incident
      6. Explosions or bombings
      7. Requested by law enforcement for a known arson fire
      8. Vegetation fires with witnesses and/or suspects
   2. In the event a fire investigator is required, the officer in charge of the scene shall contact either the Deputy Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief or the Fire Chief who will then make the request for the fire investigator to respond.
   3. If the incident is determined to be of a minor nature (such as an accident with no injuries and slight fire damage) and the origin and cause of the fire can be determined easily by the officer in charge through information received or by investigation of the fire scene (such as a stove fire with food remains on the stove) units on scene shall gather the information needed and accurately include it in the incident report.
   4. A fire investigator is not required for the following situations, however, the company officer remains responsible for the completion of an accurate incident report containing the appropriate information and documentation with regard to the fire:
      1. Scalding burns, electrical accidents and minor accidental burn injuries
      2. Vehicle fires originating in the engine area while a vehicle is being operated
      3. Minor grass, fence or trash fires with no witnesses or suspects
      4. Traffic accidents wherein the fire is subsequent to the collision, unless fire investigation assistance is requested by law enforcement
      5. Juvenile fire setters who have caused minor fires by playing with fire, matches, etc.
   5. In the case of vegetation fires of any size, the company officer must report the fire to BIA Forestry for a fire number.
   6. For vegetation fires of any size caused by juveniles, the company officer shall obtain all contact information for the juveniles and their parents and/or legal guardians. This information shall be forwarded to the Fire Prevention Division and also to BIA Forestry.
   7. All fires involving juveniles, vandalism, malicious mischief, unlawful burning or gross negligence shall be reported to law enforcement.
   8. When a fire investigator is on scene or is responding, fire personnel shall delay non-essential overhaul and secure the fire scene until a fire investigator arrives. Salvage and all unnecessary interim activities which may alter or contaminate the fire scene, or which may interfere with a subsequent origin and cause investigation, must be discontinued until authorized to continue by the responding fire investigator.
   9. On scene personnel may be asked to complete an Observation Report for incidents requiring the response of a fire investigator. Each report shall be completed in a timely manner and submitted to the fire investigator who made the request.
   10. Command shall assign personnel to protect the fire scene and maintain custody of the scene until the arrival of a fire investigator, especially when delay in response to the scene by an investigator has been indicated. Any fire that is known or suspected to be incendiary in nature will be secured as soon as the fire is under control and only essential personnel will be allowed to enter the scene until the arrival of the investigator.
   11. After achieving fire control, command shall release fire personnel not required to complete investigation and overhaul. In some cases, personnel may return to quarters and return later to the scene to complete overhaul activities when requested by the fire investigator.
   12. The fire investigator shall request from command any personnel or equipment necessary for the investigation. Command shall make every attempt to meet such requests, to the extent possible under the prevailing circumstances.
   13. Command shall maintain jurisdiction of the scene and shall confer with the fire investigator before it is released. The fire investigator may inform command that they need to maintain custody of the scene for further investigation. At no time will a scene be left unattended if further investigation is needed. It is absolutely essential that scene security and possession be maintained until the completion of the investigation. Abandonment of the scene will require investigators to obtain permission or a search warrant to re-enter the scene.
4. **Historical Note**
   1. Policy was initially created and submitted on March 4, 2012 (Draft 1) and reviewed at the regular scheduled chief’ meeting with recommendations and amendments made.
   2. The draft policy was resubmitted on May 2, 2012 (Draft 2) with those recommendations. Policy was distributed for line review without further recommendations and amendments.
   3. Policy was approved on June 6, 2012 at the regular scheduled Chief’s meeting without any amendments or recommendations.