

Standard Operating Procedures Manual

City of Poquoson Fire and Rescue



City of Poquoson Fire and Rescue

830 Poquoson Ave.
Poquoson, VA 23662
757-868-3510
F757-868-3514

Fire Investigations

SOP#: GA 29.00

Fire Investigations

Title: _____

Effective Date: July 1, 2024

Revised Date: _____

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael A. Bryant".

Fire Chief's Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve E. Gandy".

Police Chief's Signature

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City Manager's Signature

Fire Investigations

I. PURPOSE

This SOP ensures a systematic approach to engaging Fire Investigators, clarifies expectations for all personnel involved, and emphasizes collaboration with law enforcement when required. Adherence to NFPA 921 standards ensures the integrity and quality of fire investigations conducted by the City of Poquoson Fire/Rescue.

This SOP is not all-inclusive and cannot encompass all situations that may be encountered.

II. OBJECTIVE

Establish a clear and efficient process for notifying and coordinating the involvement of Fire Investigators in fire incidents and ensuring collaboration with law enforcement when required.

II. POLICY

1. Notification Process:

a. Incident Commanders (IC) will assess the need for a fire investigation based on the severity and nature of the incident.

- * All working structure fires
- * Fires with significant property damage.
- * Fires with a potential for serious injury or loss of life.
- * Fires with suspicious or unknown origins.
- * Fires with potential criminal activity.

b. If a fire investigation is deemed necessary, the Incident Commander will directly request the Fire Investigator through the designated communication channel (radio, phone, or other established means).

2. Expectations for Incident Commanders:

a. Clearly communicate the need for a Fire Investigator based on the severity of the incident and potential for complex investigation.

b. Incident commanders should not delay notification if an Investigator is needed, recognizing the importance of time-sensitive evidence.

c. Provide relevant information to the Fire Investigator, including incident location, nature of the fire, and any initial observations, witness statements, and initial assessments.

d. ICs shall secure the fire scene and limit access to authorized personnel only.

e. Preserve the integrity of potential evidence until the Investigator arrives.

f. Notify relevant personnel of the impending investigation and emphasize the importance of cooperation.

3. Expectations for Fire Personnel:

a. Recognize the indicators that may necessitate a fire investigation.

b. Preserve the fire scene integrity until the Fire Investigator arrives.

c. Cooperate fully with the Investigator upon their arrival.

d. Assist the Fire Investigator upon arrival, providing necessary support for evidence collection and scene documentation.

4. Fire Investigator Initial Actions:

a. Upon notification, the Fire Investigator shall promptly respond to the incident scene or designated meeting point.

b. Upon arrival, the Fire Investigator shall coordinate with the IC and other relevant personnel to assess the scene and initiate the investigation.

5. Collaboration with Law Enforcement:

a. If the investigation indicates potential criminal activity, the Fire Investigator shall collaborate with law enforcement agencies as necessary.

b. Share information and coordinate investigative efforts to ensure a comprehensive approach to the case.

c. Ensure compliance with legal requirements and maintain the chain of custody for potential evidence.

6. NFPA 921 Standard Compliance:

a. All fire investigations will be conducted in strict accordance with the most current edition of NFPA 921 standard.

b. Investigators are responsible for staying informed about updates to NFPA 921 and adjusting procedures accordingly.

7. Documentation and Reporting:

- a. Investigators will maintain detailed documentation of the investigation process, adhering to NFPA 921 guidelines, including evidence collection, interviews, and analysis.
- b. A comprehensive report will be submitted promptly, summarizing findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

8. Post-Investigation Procedures:

- a. Provide a timely and comprehensive report to the Incident Commander.
- b. Participate in post-incident debriefings to share insights and lessons learned.
- c. If applicable, collaborate with law enforcement for ongoing legal proceedings.

9. Review and Quality Assurance:

- a. Regularly review and update procedures to align with best practices and standards.
- b. Conduct internal audits to ensure adherence to SOP and quality of investigations.

Cautionary Notes:

- Incident Commanders should prioritize safety and scene preservation.
- Maintain clear and respectful communication between all parties involved.

Efficiency Tips:

- Establish a dedicated communication channel for fire investigation notifications.
- Conduct periodic joint training sessions with law enforcement to enhance collaboration.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

BETWEEN THE POQUOSON FIRE DEPARTMENT AND POQUOSON POLICE DEPARTMENT FOR FIRE/EXPLOSIVES INVESTIGATIONS

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is entered into by and between the Poquoson Fire Department (hereinafter referred to as "PFD") and the Poquoson Police Department (hereinafter referred to as "PPD")

1. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this MOU is to establish guidelines and procedures for collaboration between the PFD and PPD in the conduct of fire investigations within the jurisdiction of the City of Poquoson. This collaboration aims to enhance public safety, promote efficient use of resources, and facilitate a coordinated response to incidents involving fire or explosion.

2. DEFINITIONS:

- a. **Fire Investigation:** The systematic process of determining the origin, cause, and circumstances of a fire.
- b. **Lead Agency:** The agency primarily responsible for conducting the fire investigation.
- c. **Supporting Agency:** The agency that provides assistance and resources to the lead agency during a fire investigation.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

a. Poquoson Fire Department (PFD):

- i. Conduct initial fire scene assessments and determine the need for a formal investigation.
- ii. Serve as the lead agency in fire investigations, unless otherwise agreed upon.
- iii. Collect and preserve evidence related to the fire incident.
- iv. Coordinate with PPD to ensure a seamless exchange of information.

b. Poquoson Police Department (PPD):

- i. Provide timely and necessary assistance to the PFD in fire investigations.
- ii. Assist in securing the fire scene and managing crowds if necessary.
- iii. Conduct joint interviews with potential witnesses as needed.
- iv. Collect and preserve evidence related to the fire incident.

- v. Execute search warrants as needed.
- vi. Collaborate with the PFD to share relevant information and findings.
- vii. Assist in developing case files and moving cases to the Commonwealth Attorney's office when appropriate

4. COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION:

- a. Regular Meetings: Representatives from PFD and PPD shall meet regularly to discuss ongoing and potential fire investigations, share updates, and address any challenges.
- b. Information Sharing: Both parties agree to share relevant information related to fire investigations in a timely and transparent manner.

5. TRAINING:

- a. PFD and PPD may organize joint training sessions to enhance the skills and knowledge of their personnel in fire investigation and related areas.
- b. Both departments will share relevant training resources, materials, and expertise to improve the overall competence of personnel involved in fire investigations.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY:

- a. Both parties recognize the sensitive nature of information involved in fire investigations.
- b. Information shared between PFD and PPD shall be treated as confidential and used solely for investigative purposes.

7. TERMINATION:

Either party may terminate this MOU with a written notice of 30 days. Termination will not affect ongoing investigations, and both parties will continue to cooperate until the completion of such investigations.

This MOU shall become effective upon the signature of authorized representatives from both the Poquoson Fire Department and Poquoson Police Department.

 Signature
[Stephen Keatts, Police Chief - PPD] Poquoson Police Department

 Signature
[Michael Bryant, Fire Chief - PFD] Poquoson Fire Department

Date May 13, 2024

