



“The First Responder’s Role in Fire Investigation” User’s Guide

This User’s Guide accompanies the DVD “The First Responder’s Role in Fire Investigation.” This video demonstrates how first responders can contribute positively to the fire investigation by making observations at the fire scene, preserving the scene, documenting their observations and actions, and communicating them to command.

The goals of this User’s Guide are:

- To provide a “shorthand” way to remember the video’s best practices
- To suggest ways that the user can support these best practices within their department
- To foster communication between department members about the observe, preserve, document, and communicate best practices

Integrating Best Practices from “The First Responder’s Role in Fire Investigation” into Your Routine

The key to remembering to practice the principals covered in the video is to find ways to integrate them into your incident response routine. Here are suggestions for how to accomplish that:

- Speak to your supervisor about the best practices covered in the video, especially with regard to fire attack tactics and overhaul. If he/she has not seen the video, suggest that they watch it. Discuss what practices from the video you already do in your unit and what new ideas you can adopt. Then, set a time for your entire unit to discuss the best practices, what is expected of each of you with regard to communication and preservation, and how your unit is to document and report its observations and actions. Hand out copies of the Quick Reference Card.
- Print out multiple copies of the Quick Reference Card in this Guide and stash those copies in multiple locations tied to your response routine, such as:
 - Post one in your locker.
 - Post one in the common room of your stationhouse.
 - Place one near your seat in the response vehicle(s) you ride in.
 - Tuck one in the pocket of your uniform, incident notebook, or response gear.
 - Place one in your toolkit, if you carry one to the scene.
- Use the mnemonic FIRES to remember the five main categories of observations to make during the call:
 - **F**ire characteristics and behavior
 - **I**ndividuals, meaning victims, witnesses, crowd members, and others tied to the fire scene
 - **R**esponse, meaning your suppression tactics and actions



THE FIRST RESPONDER'S ROLE IN FIRE INVESTIGATION



- **E**ntry and exit points, meaning the conditions of all doors and windows as you encountered them
- **S**trange, meaning any item, condition, or absence of an item or condition that seems unusual, unexpected, or out-of-place
- Place a small notebook or pieces of paper and a pen/pencil in a place or item that you come in contact with for every fire (vehicle, turnout gear, BDUs, uniform). Use this to immediately write down all your observations and actions soon after each fire. Make this part of your routine, doing it at the same time every time and in connection with another task you always do, such as decontaminating your gear or buttoning up the truck.
- If you have reporting responsibility for your unit, ensure you provide the answers to the questions on the Fire Incident Response Data Sheet to the fire investigator or chief.
- Write down the contact information for the fire investigators who serve your area and put it with your other professional contacts or paperwork.
- After each fire, take a moment to talk to your first responder colleagues about what you all encountered at the scene. This debrief can help identify things that should be reported.
- During cleanup after the fire is out, be proactive and seek out your superior, the Incident Commander, or the fire investigator and communicate your observations and actions. Take the initiative; don't wait for someone to ask you.
- Every three months, take a few moments to rewatch the DVD again to refresh your memory on what you can be doing at the scene to assist in observation and preservation.

Visit CFITrainer.Net® for Additional Training

For an expanded training opportunity in observing, preserving, documenting, and communicating, visit CFITrainer.Net®. CFITrainer.Net® is a free training resource for the fire service. A free module called “How First Responders Impact The Fire Investigation” is available. It contains additional information on these topics. You may choose to earn a certificate of completion for the module that can confer Continuing Education Unit credit.



“The First Responder’s Role in Fire Investigation” Quick Reference Card

OBSERVE

Fire characteristics and behavior:

- Color of smoke and flames
- Velocity of smoke
- Light push or heavy push
- Height and level of flames
- Any odors
- Fire behavior

Individuals, including the demeanor, dress, location, injuries, smells, behavior, and statements of:

- Victims
- Witnesses
- Crowd members
- People leaving the scene

Response:

- Whether burglar and smoke alarms were sounding
- Fire attack pattern
- Suppression tactics
- Overhaul actions
- Moving furniture and contents
- Changing the position of any items

Entry and exit points:

- Condition of doors and windows upon arrival
- Were doors closed/open?
locked/unlocked?
- Whether or not door had to be forced to make entry
- Condition of utilities upon arrival
- Who or what broke windows

Strange:

- Any item, condition, or absence of an item or condition that seems unusual, out of the ordinary, unexpected, or out of place
- Poor housekeeping
- Evidence of a possible crime

PRESERVE

Suppression:

- Tactics that preserve walls, contents, and patterns, including combination fog nozzles and hitting ceiling above fire instead of base of fire
- Only use as much water as necessary

Overhaul:

- Use thermal cameras to pinpoint hotspots
- Leave objects in place or as close to in place as possible
- Do not throw contents out of the room
- Do not break windows unless absolutely necessary
- Extinguish furnishings in place
- Do not remove sheetrock unless absolutely necessary
- Refrain from flooding floor with water
- Stop overhaul when reach a non-burned section
- Avoid using gasoline-powered tools

Control:

- Establish a perimeter
- Establish one point of ingress and egress and log in and out
- Limit scene access to only necessary personnel
- Keep civilians out of the fire scene
- Cordon off deceased victims

DOCUMENT

- Witness contact information
- Observations
- Written report preservation

COMMUNICATE

- To supervisor or fire investigator



Fire Incident Response Data Sheet

The responses on this data sheet can be attached to your standard fire report and/or communicated verbally to the fire investigator. They will provide additional important detail for the fire investigator.

1. Incident address:
2. Date and time of incident:
3. Weather:
4. Incident Commander:
5. First-In Unit Members:
6. Engineer:
7. What was the condition of doors and windows upon arrival? Was the entry door closed and/or locked? Which doors, if any, had to be forced?
8. What door was used for entry?
9. What door was used as secondary egress?
10. Were smoke or burglar alarms sounding?
11. Describe the smoke and fire conditions upon arrival.
12. How did the fire react to the application of water?
13. What, if any, smells were noted?
14. What fire suppression tactics were employed?
15. What, if any, objects were moved and where were they moved to during suppression and overhaul?
16. What individuals were noted (victims, witnesses, crowd members) and what were their conditions? Please list any contact information taken.
17. What, if any unusual items or conditions were noted or expected and absent?
18. What safety concerns were observed/noted during the suppression? Relay this information to the fire investigator(s) and/or command.