

**BODEGA BAY FIRE DISTRICT
STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINES**

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SUBJECT: FIRE INVESTIGATION

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According to the Uniform Fire Code and NFPA recommendations, all fires occurring within the Bodega Bay Fire District shall be investigated to determine the cause and origin (incendiary, accidental, or natural). The Fire Chief is responsible for all fire investigations and shall be contacted whenever additional investigative resources are requested. On wildland fires, Cal Fire will be the primary investigating agency.

When a Company Officer or Incident Commander (IC) encounters a fire incident of unknown origin or a suspected incendiary fire, he/she shall contact Control 2 and request the assistance of the Sonoma County Fire Investigation Task Force. The Fire Chief shall also be contacted. Once on-scene, the Company Officer or IC shall assist Task Force members as needed to complete the investigation. If arson or other criminal activity is discovered or suspected, the Sonoma County Sheriffs Office shall be contacted to respond to the scene and coordinate investigation with the Task Force. If the fire involves arson related to a hate crime, church, or retail store, hotel, or other business involved in the commercial sale or use of purchased goods that crossed interstate lines when shipped to Bodega Bay, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF&E), Santa Rosa office, can be contacted for additional investigative assistance.

The following on-scene procedures are necessary to minimize damaging evidence or altering the fire scene and to preserve the scene for investigative determination of cause and origin.

- 1) To the extent possible during fire suppression, the Company Officer or IC shall direct engine crew efforts in a manner that avoids the unnecessary destruction of potential evidence with respect to water usage, salvage, and overhaul. The safety of the fire crew and the public always comes first.

- 2) Engine company members should be alert to the following signs and indications of a possible incendiary fire: The status of doors or windows (locked or open); evidence of forced entry; prying tools or screwdrivers found in areas out of the ordinary; contents of rooms that appear ransacked; more than one point of fire origin; location of a fire in an area remote from normal ignition sources; flashbacks, re-ignition, or an increase in fire intensity that may indicate possible use of an accelerant; intense fire and burn patterns or depth of char indicating the possible use of an accelerant; presence of the remnants of suspected incendiary ignition devices (glass, electrical, mechanical) or trailer devices used to spread fire from one area to another; presence of containers or cans that may have been used to transport accelerants; disconnected gas lines; or signs of tampering or

damage to fire detection and prevention systems. Any indications of an incendiary fire shall be reported to the Company Officer.

3) To the extent that the fire scene is safe to occupy and re-ignition of the fire is unlikely, further salvage and overhaul operations shall be postponed until fire investigators arrive on scene for inspection. Avoid disturbing, moving, or walking upon any possible evidence. Leave the evidence in place unless movement is necessary to prevent further deterioration or destruction.

4) Secure the fire scene by cordoning off the area with fire line tape and barricades and assign necessary personnel for on-site security and supervision. In a larger public area, law enforcement assistance may be needed. Restrict access and deny entry to anyone who does not have a fire operations, law enforcement, or investigative purpose to be on the scene, including the property owner. Any question about a person's legitimacy on the fire scene shall be cleared with the IC. Maintain a written log of all persons who come onto the scene prior to the arrival of the fire investigator, including person's name, time of entry, and time of departure.

The fire scene shall remain secured until released by the Task Force or law enforcement. At that time, further salvage and overhaul operations may continue at the direction of the Company Officer or IC.

5) The Company Officer and crew members should be prepared to provide a fire investigator a chronological account of important circumstances and details as soon as reasonably possible after the fire.