



***SULLIVAN COUNTY
BUREAU OF FIRE***

FIRE INVESTIGATION TEAM

**POLICY, RESPONSIBILITIES AND
QUALIFICATIONS**



SULLIVAN COUNTY FIRE INVESTIGATION TEAM

The Sullivan County Fire Investigation Team is an all-volunteer group, comprised of personnel from the fire service and law enforcement agencies. The Team was formed in 1981, pursuant to General Municipal Law (*section 204-c Plan for arson investigation*) mandate, requiring every county to have a plan to combat arson in the State of New York.

The Team shall consist of Fire Investigators who are supervised by the Fire Coordinator. The Investigators will be available through continuous communication with the 911 Center. The members of the Team will be chosen and appointed by the Fire Coordinator, at his discretion and as needed.

The General Municipal Law (*section 204-d Duties of the fire chief*) requires each Fire Chief “to the extent reasonably possible”, to determine or cause to be determined, the cause of each fire or explosion, which the department has been called to suppress. The Fire Investigation Team is available to assist the Chief in determining the origin and cause of any fire or explosion while working within the Incident Command System as dictated by the National Incident Management System.

The investigators will complete a thorough and systematic evaluation of physical and testimonial evidence at the fire/explosion scene employing the Scientific Method as defined in current editions of NFPA 921 Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations and NFPA 1033 Standard for Professional Qualifications for Fire Investigator. If they are present, burn patterns and other physical evidence are analyzed to develop a hypothesis as to the origin and cause of the fire/explosion. Photographic and sketch documentation and note taking are important aspects of the investigator’s responsibilities.

If the cause of the fire/explosion is determined to be accidental or natural, the Investigator will provide the Fire Chief with the information necessary for him/her to complete the required Fire Report. If the cause of the fire/explosion is determined to be incendiary the investigator will advise the Chief to notify the appropriate law enforcement agency to respond for investigation. The Investigator(s) may continue their investigation to the extent requested by the law enforcement agency, no evidence will be retained by the investigators of the Sullivan county Bureau of Fire (SCBF)

Each Investigator must receive training for the investigation of fire/explosion origin and cause. The initial training class is 36 hours (Fire Behavior & Arson Awareness, Principles of Fire Investigation), and after completion, a further 30 hours of documented Fire Investigation is required for the Investigator to receive a NYS Level 1 certification. Training for Level 1 investigator must be completed within one year of joining the Team. Next is the 80 hour fire and arson investigation course given at the NYS Fire Academy, and after completion and a further 50 hours of documented Fire Investigation, the Investigator receives a NYS Level 2 certification. In addition, each Investigator must complete 6 hours of annual refresher training, or 20 documented hours

of Fire Investigation annually to comply with NYS Office of Fire Prevention and Control requirements. It is our goal to bring each Investigator to Level 2 certification as soon as possible after they join the Team. Pro Board (National) certification is also strongly recommended. Additional training in Building Construction, Electrical Fire Cause, Interviewing, Photography, Vehicle Fires, Juvenile Fire Setting and other related fields will also be beneficial to Team members.

Senior Fire Investigator

The Sullivan County Fire Investigation Team shall have a Senior Fire Investigator, who will serve as the Team Leader. The Senior Fire Investigator is appointed by the Fire Coordinator and shall serve at his pleasure.

Responsibilities:

1. Insure that a continuing education program on fire/explosion origin and cause and arson recognition be established within Sullivan County and insure that all persons serving as Fire Investigators attend training on a regular basis.
2. Serve as a liaison between the Investigators, the County Fire Coordinator, the District Attorney's Office and law enforcement agencies.
3. Prepare the required monthly and annual reports to the Fire Coordinator detailing the number of responses of each investigator, the fires/explosions in each Battalion, and the origin and cause of all fire/explosions. Supervise the compilation and assessment of statistics relating to the number of fires or explosions investigated and any patterns identified.
4. Monitor follow-up with the Fire Chief of jurisdiction concerning the progress and results of any relevant investigations as may be appropriate.
5. Prepare any notices necessary to advise the Investigators of monthly activities.
6. Check inventory of necessary supplies and request purchases through the County Fire Coordinator. Equipment inventory will be maintained in the Fire Coordinator's office.
7. Review all reports submitted by the investigators for thoroughness and accuracy.

Qualifications:

1. Actively involved in the fire service or be a police officer who has specialized in fire investigation, or be involved in a related profession involving the investigation of fires.
2. Minimum of two (2) years experience as a fire investigator.
3. Have at least five (5) years supervisory experience in the fire service, law enforcement or fire investigation field.

4. Consent to a criminal background check and driver's license check completed by Sullivan County Sheriff's Office.
5. Demonstrate the necessary communication and administrative skills to effectively coordinate the activities of the Sullivan County Fire Investigation Team.
6. Must have prior service as a Fire Investigator with Sullivan County.

Fire Investigator

Duties and Responsibilities:

1. When a Chief requests the Fire Investigation Team to an incident, the 911 Center will poll for available investigators. After advising the Sullivan County 911 Center they are available for assignment, they then respond
2. Examine, analyze and investigate the fire scene with the goal of determining the origin and cause of the fire/explosion, taking proper care to avoid any spoliation of potential evidence.
3. Conduct an investigation to determine the origin and cause by:
 - a. Personal observation;
 - b. Investigating the fire/explosion scene area and documenting the scene;
 - c. Absent special or extenuating circumstances, only digital media (photo/videos) will be used to document SCBF investigations. All photo images will be described on a Photo Log Sheet and a CD containing all photo images along with the log sheet will be submitted to the SCBF with work copies maintained by the investigator.
 - d. Take detailed field notes using NFPA 921 Annex A forms or comparable documents. The investigator's original notes will be submitted to the SCBF for retention with the photo images and log as described above. Work copies may be retained by the investigator.
 - e. Interviews of witnesses and occupants as appropriate
 - f. All SCBF reports will be submitted within 10 days of the incident if possible. All reports will be submitted through the ATF's Bomb Arson Tracking System (BATS) currently in use. The investigator may use his/her discretion as to how many photo images to include in the computer report. Reports must be completed and written in a clear and professional manner, fully describing the investigative acts undertaken along with the findings and conclusions arrived at.
 - g. Physical evidence will be collected only at the request of a law enforcement agency and turned over to a representative of that agency at the scene with proper transfer documentation being made. No physical evidence will be retained by the SCBF. If exigent circumstances exist, evidence may be documented and collected to prevent imminent destruction or loss prior to law enforcement arrival.
 - h. Continue cooperation with appropriate police agencies, as necessary.

4. Deciding Origin and Cause:
 - a. If origin and cause is accidental or natural, provide the Fire Chief of jurisdiction with the information to enable him/her to file their NFIRS report.
 - b. At any point that the origin and cause of a fire is determined to be incendiary the investigator will advise the Fire Chief to make immediate notification to a police agency of jurisdiction. The Fire Investigator should continue investigation along with the police agency if so requested and any evidence collected will be secured by the police agency.
 - c. All notes, paperwork, reports and photographs prepared by an investigator in the course of an investigation shall be maintained and secured in office of the Sullivan County Bureau of Fire. Under no circumstances shall an investigator destroy or modify any document without the approval of the Fire Coordinator or District Attorney.
 - d. Maintain accurate records of miles traveled, time spent and expenses for all investigation. Mileage expenses should be filed at a minimum of every three (3) months.
5. Utilize and be accountable for any county equipment issued or assigned.
6. Attend at least one seminar or conference per year pertaining to fire/explosion investigation to meet the New York State OFPC annual refresher training requirements or complete on-line fire/arson/explosion related training. Copies of any training course completion records will be forwarded to the Senior Investigator for inclusion in the investigator's personnel file. Investigators must also maintain a basic up to date knowledge of fire/explosion investigation best practices as set forth in current editions of NFPA 1033 Professional Qualifications for Fire Investigators and NFPA 921 Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations.
7. No Fire Investigator will conduct any cause and origin investigation in Sullivan County for a private entity or agency.
8. Investigators will maintain confidentiality with respect to all investigations except to provide the Fire Chief of jurisdiction with the information required for his/her reports as previously noted

Fire Investigator (continued)

Qualifications for Fire Service Members

1. Must be an active member of a fire department in Sullivan County and be in good standing with their home department or be a police officer who has

- specialized in fire investigation, or be involved in a related profession involving the investigation of fires.
2. Must have completed at least five (5) years as a line officer (chief, assistant chief, captain or lieutenant.)
 3. Must have completed training in basic fire fighting, command, fire investigation, leadership and be NIMS (National Incident Management System) compliant.
 4. Must have basic computer skills, including use of Internet, electronic mail, calendar, word processing, data base, spreadsheets and good report writing abilities.
 5. Must have good people skills and the ability to work within a chain of command, deal diplomatically with the public, work with fire chiefs and line officers, and be in a physical condition commensurate with the demands of the job.
 6. Must have a valid New York State motor vehicle driver's license and a motor vehicle to use as part of the job demands.
 7. Must be available for response to emergency assignments both in and out of the county, as necessary.
 8. Must be available to attend meetings, drills and training sessions as required.
 9. Consent to a criminal background check and pass and driver's license check completed by Sullivan County Sheriff's Office.
 10. Having completed items 1 thru 9 candidates for fire Investigator must complete an interview by the Fire Coordinator prior an appointment.
 11. At the time of appointment, all candidates must have permission from the Fire Chief of jurisdiction, that they are a member is good standing, complete an annual physical and fill out the Special Operations application.