

<b>TITLE</b> OPERATIONS MANUAL	<b>STANDARD</b> <b>INSTRUCTION</b> 01		<b>DEPARTMENT</b> FIRE-RESCUE
<b>SUBJECT:</b> FIRE, ARSON AND BOMB INVESTIGATION	<b>SECTION</b> 11	<b>PAGE</b> 1 of 5	<b>EFFECTIVE DATE</b> July 30, 2024

**I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to provide personnel guidance on when to access the Metro Arson Strike Team (MAST).

**II. SCOPE**

This policy shall apply to all sworn San Diego Fire-Rescue Department (SDFD) personnel, excluding Lifeguard personnel.

**III. AUTHORITY**

The Fire Chief authorizes the information within this policy.

**IV. POLICY**

A. Initiating a MAST Investigation

1. Company officers and incident commanders may use the following mnemonic to call out the Metro Arson Strike Team Investigators.
  - i. Major fires/explosions
  - ii. Arson fires
  - iii. Serious injury or death resulting from the fire
  - iv. Telephone consult for all other fires

B. Investigation Scene Security

1. After initial fire extinguishment and necessary overhaul to extinguish hidden fires, all personnel shall be removed from the area to be protected.
  - i. The posting of a firefighter or a law enforcement officer will usually be adequate to ensure security until the arrival of MAST investigators.
  - ii. It is the ultimate responsibility of the incident commander to ensure that the scene is protected until MAST releases the scene.
  - iii. The incident commander will be notified by the MAST supervisor when they are finished with the scene.
2. The scene of a suspicious or incendiary fire shall not be left unattended prior to consultation with, or arrival of MAST investigators.
  - i. At least one fire suppression company shall remain on the scene with instructions to deny entrance to unauthorized persons.
  - ii. The company receiving this assignment shall refrain from discussion of the incident except with fire investigators or other responsible Department personnel.
  - iii. The fire scene and all items of evidence shall be protected from contamination, preserving it exactly as it as when the fire was extinguished.
  - iv. All persons, including fire personnel and news media personnel, shall be denied access until the scene has been released by MAST.
3. Building owners and tenants shall not be allowed to enter/re-enter fire scenes until the scene has been released by MAST.

<b>TITLE</b> OPERATIONS MANUAL	<b>STANDARD</b> INSTRUCTION 01		<b>DEPARTMENT</b> FIRE-RESCUE
<b>SUBJECT:</b> FIRE SUPPRESSION FIRE, ARSON AND BOMB INVESTIGATION	<b>SECTION</b> 11	<b>PAGE</b> 2 of 5	<b>EFFECTIVE DATE</b> REVISION

4. Security of bomb scenes entails securing much larger areas.
  - i. The initial security perimeter will extend 300' outward from the most distant piece of debris that resulted from the blast.
  - ii. This perimeter will have the suspected seat of the blast as its center point.
  - iii. Security for this area will be initially provided by fire and law enforcement as they arrive at the scene and will be maintained until Bomb Squad personnel redefines the general search area.
  - iv. All personnel securing the scene must be alert to identify possible debris from the blast.
  - v. Debris must be left in place and civilians in the area must be prohibited from removing any object.

C. Deaths

1. The possibility of homicide must be considered in all fire deaths until the fire cause has been determined.
  - i. The incident commander will immediately contact the Emergency Command and Data Center (ECDC) to request law enforcement when a death occurs on a fire scene.
  - ii. Scene security is essential to ensure the admissibility of evidence in court.
  - iii. Proper scene security is the result of prompt and effective exclusion of all personnel except MAST or homicide investigators.
  - iv. Fire Operations personnel involvement will be limited to necessary extinguishment of fire and ventilation.
  - v. Incident command shall also notify on scene law enforcement so that they can aid with scene security and witness identification.
  - vi. The decision to move a body prior to the arrival of the coroner must be approved by MAST, or homicide investigators, and must be based on the need to prevent further damage to the body by fire or extinguishment operations.
2. Deaths resulting from a suspected bomb or an explosion must be treated as a homicide.
  - i. The same rules that apply to fire deaths must be applied in these incidents.
  - ii. In addition, due to the blast, portions of the victim may be found in areas some distance from the initial blast.
  - iii. If located, they should be protected from the elements, bystanders, or animals by covering with a blanket and left in place under close observation.
3. Fire personnel are expected to give an exact account of their activities.
  - i. Personnel should be able to do this in detail and give descriptions of any people present, what they said, etc.

<b>TITLE</b> OPERATIONS MANUAL	<b>STANDARD</b> <b>INSTRUCTION 01</b>		<b>DEPARTMENT</b> FIRE-RESCUE
<b>SUBJECT:</b> FIRE, ARSON AND BOMB INVESTIGATION	<b>SECTION</b> 11	<b>PAGE</b> 3 of 5	<b>EFFECTIVE DATE</b> July 30, 2024

- ii. The condition of doors, windows and how the building was entered is important information that will be needed in detail.
- iii. Fire personnel should be able to do this at all fires, but it is extremely important when there is fire death or severe injury.
- iv. Prior to going off duty, all firefighting personnel that were involved in any manner with a fire scene involving a death or severe injury may be required to prepare a written statement reporting all their activities at the scene.

**D. Preserving Evidence/Fire and Bomb Scene**

Any item identified as evidence at an incendiary fire or post-blast scene shall be preserved and secured in place pending the arrival of MAST. If this is not practical, firefighters shall take the following precautions in all cases:

1. Photograph the evidence prior to removal from its location.
2. Make a sketch of the item in relation to other furnishings.
3. Carefully pick the item up with gloves. Do not touch with bare fingers.
4. Do not wipe the evidence.
5. Place item in paper or plastic bag.
6. Securely affix a tag or label with the date and time, incident number, location and name.
7. Include with evidence an email to MAST describing the items and their location and a sketch.
8. Do not discard any evidence.
9. Evidence must never be sent through the mail.
  - i. Evidence must be hand-delivered to the investigator immediately.
  - ii. If evidence needs to be picked up, notify the MAST Investigator as soon as possible.
  - iii. Never lose possession or control of the evidence until it is turned over to an investigator.

**E. Interviewing Burn Victims**

1. The purpose of interviewing burn victims is to obtain information from the victim which may prove useful in determining fire cause.
2. If MAST members are responding to the incident, they shall be responsible for the interview.

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<b>SUBJECT:</b> FIRE, ARSON AND BOMB INVESTIGATION	<b>SECTION</b> 11	<b>PAGE</b> 4 of 5	<b>EFFECTIVE DATE</b> July 30, 2024

3. After examination of the fire scene, investigators will respond to hospitals, if necessary, to conduct interviews.
4. Information gained in the interview will then be transmitted as needed to the appropriate investigating officer.

F. News Media

While news media personnel may be permitted at emergency scenes, they do not have the authority to be within a crime scene or area which has been secured to preserve evidence. Permission to enter protected areas must be given by MAST.

1. Fire personnel are not to be interviewed regarding fire or emergency incidents by media personnel. These interviews will be granted by:
  - i. Incident Commander
  - ii. Public Information Officers
  - iii. Metro Arson Strike Team investigators
2. General information interviews (i.e., fire safety) shall be coordinated with and under the direction of the Public Information Unit.

G. Fire Loss Estimation

Fire officers must provide dollar loss figures in NFIRS reports. These dollar amounts are *estimates* used for statistics that affect public policy and funding. Insurance companies utilize software and industry experts, producing a *precise* dollar loss amount to pay the insured.

1. Key Points:
  - i. Fire loss includes damage from water, smoke, fire, and overhaul
  - ii. Fire loss does not include indirect loss such as business interruption
2. Procedure:
  - i. Determine the effective square footage of the structure damaged.
  - ii. Multiply the effective square feet by the cost per square foot to rebuild the structure and round to nearest \$10,000
  - iii. Pre-incident value can be calculated by multiplying the square feet of the entire structure by the cost per square foot to rebuild
  - iv. Estimating loss to contents can be made by speaking to the occupant and utilizing your own observations

**Cost Factor to Rebuild (cost per square foot as of 2024):**

<b>Commercial</b>	<b>Residential</b>
<b>\$700</b>	<b>\$500</b>

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**Example:**

Room and content fire in a 1600 sq ft wood framed house. One bedroom burned post-flashover and smoke/water damaged the remaining rooms.

100% loss of 150 sq ft bedroom, 10% smoke/water damage to remaining 1,350 square feet.

100% Loss	10% Loss	Total Loss
150 x \$500=\$75,000	1,350 x \$50=\$67,500	<b>\$142,500</b>

**\$142,500** rounded to the nearest \$10,000 makes Total Fire Loss is \$140,000