



Homeland Security and Emergency Services

Fire Prevention and Control

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DATE: March 17, 2017

TO: OFPC Staff
County Fire Coordinators
State Fire Services Organizations
Law Enforcement Agencies

FROM: Paul D. Martin
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SUBJECT: Fire Investigation Curriculum and Certification

The world which we live in is ever changing and that change influences each of the varying disciplines within the emergency services. In executing its mission, the Office of Fire Prevention and Control strives to be a nationally recognized leader in the fire service. To that end, a large component of how OFPC meets that challenge includes delivering the highest quality, state of the art, and most comprehensive training to emergency responders. In an effort to maintain the highest quality of that training we are continually evaluating and updating our various courses.

In early 2015, members from OFPC's Investigation Unit began evaluating the current format and content of our core fire investigation courses. That evaluation identified areas where, although already comprehensive and aligned with applicable standards, the programs could use modification. Over the ensuing two years investigations personnel worked at repackaging the information and reformatting the delivery, essentially developing two new courses; a forty (40) hour ***Introduction to Fire Investigation*** class and a two week program titled ***Fire Investigation***.

This new delivery will require participants to utilize a designated text throughout both courses. That text coupled with required access to National Fire Protection Association Standards 921 and 1033, will remain a valuable reference document after course completion. The enhanced format will also provide a more fluid approach to the curriculum with practical components included in the ***Introduction to Fire Investigation*** course in addition to those exercises included in the two week program.

Court rulings, legal challenges, ever increasing scrutiny in the forensic sciences community, coupled with large financial settlements for wrongful prosecution demand change. To ensure that emergency responders in New York State, in this case specifically Fire Investigators, meet or exceed established standards, OFPC is excited to launch these new courses and couple them with updates in our fire investigator certification processes. Through implementing these changes, OFPC will ensure that its students and candidates seeking professional qualification certification, not only receive the highest quality of instruction, but that they are also properly certified to meet the challenges they face.

Included with this letter is a frequently asked questions document designed to answer most of the questions that you may have regarding the new courses, admission to and hosting of them and changes that will be made regarding OFPC's fire investigator certification process. Should you have further questions please contact Deputy Chief William McGovern (518) 474-6746 or Deputy Chief Bret Welch (607) 535-7136.

NYS OFPC Fire Investigation Curriculum Update

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Will my county still offer FIRE BEHAVIOR / ARSON AWARENESS and PRINCIPLES OF FIRE INVESTIGATION?

A. No, neither course will continue to be offered through the fire investigation curriculum. Your county may request one of two new courses that will be delivered regionally. Those courses are; a six (6) hour course, **FIRE INVESTIGATION FOR THE LINE OFFICER** or a forty (40) hour course, **INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION**.

Q. How does my county request an FIRE INVESTIGATION FOR THE LINE OFFICER or INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION course?

A. Either course can be requested through the NYS OFPC assigned County TAD by submitting a *Proposed Fire Training Schedule*. In the field, **INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION** will only be offered as a regional, multi- county / jurisdiction course.

Q. What is required for my County/Region to host an INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION course?

A. Hosting the course at a fire training ground would be ideal. A classroom to hold up to 25 students with full audio/visual capabilities is required. Local officials must also provide resources for two (2) fully furnished, burn pods. These pods must be dedicated to the course for its duration. Specifications and material lists are available.

Q. How long is the INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION course?

A. **INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION** is a one (1) week / forty (40) hour offering.

Q. Can I take the INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION course at the Fire Academy?

A. Yes, it will be offered in a Monday through Friday format.

Q. Does INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION have to be offered as a one week consecutive course or will be there a breakdown of the course offered?

A. The course can be given in various formats, the consecutive one week offering or a combination of four (4) hour instructional blocks. The series of four hour blocks will be agreed upon between the Office of Fire Prevention and Control and the sponsoring agencies to insure comprehensive delivery without prolonged duration that would lessen the learning experience.

Q. Will the FIRE INVESTIGATION course be offered in the field?

A. No, this course is only offered at the NYS Academy of Fire Science.

Q. Does my fire chief need to approve my participation in the INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION course?

A. Yes. The fire chief and the supervisor of your county's fire investigation program will both need to approve your application. This will apply to candidates wishing to attend either the INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION or the FIRE INVESTIGATION course. Candidates need only be prospective members of a designated investigation unit to attend the INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION course, but MUST be a member of that investigation unit to attend the FIRE INVESTIGATION course.

- * Fire department based investigation teams recognized in a county's arson control plan and law enforcement agencies are exempted from obtaining the signature of the county's fire investigation program supervisor.

Q. What happens if I am currently a NYS Level 1 fire investigator?

A. You will maintain that certification until April 1, 2020, when it will no longer be recognized. During that time, to continue your fire investigator certification you need to successfully complete the two week FIRE INVESTIGATION course. Upon completion of that course, you will have up to two additional years to obtain the required practical fire investigation field work to attain NYS Fire Investigator certification. For purposes of documentation, a maximum of four (4) hours per incident will be accepted.

Q. I took PRINCIPLES OF FIRE INVESTIGATION but have not applied for my Level 1 certification yet. What should I do?

A. If you have taken and passed FIRE BEHAVIOR / ARSON AWARENESS and PRINCIPLES OF FIRE INVESTIGATION, you will have until April 1, 2020 to successfully complete the two week FIRE INVESTIGATION course. Upon completion of that course, you will have up to two additional years to perform and document a total of 80 hours of fire investigation field work to apply for NYS Fire Investigator certification. For purposes of documentation, a maximum of four (4) hours per incident will be accepted.

Q. What happens if I am a current NYS Level 2 fire investigator?

A. Prior to April 1, 2020 you must take the national ProBoard® Fire Investigator Exam proctored by the Office of Fire Prevention and Control. Individuals who are currently certified by ProBoard® do not have to take the test again.

Q. I'm just starting out and want to be a fire investigator, what must I do?

A. You will need to attend both courses, INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION and FIRE INVESTIGATION. Those courses will be restricted to members of fire investigation teams designated in each county's arson control plan. Prospective members of fire investigation teams may attend INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION if they are endorsed by their fire chief and the supervisor of your county's fire investigation program. Upon successful completion of those courses you must perform and document eighty (80) hours of various fire investigation tasks under the direction/guidance of a certified fire investigator. For purposes of documentation, a maximum of four (4) hours per incident will be accepted. That documentation must then be submitted to the Office of Fire Prevention and Control for approval.

Q. What happens if I do not complete my NYS Fire Investigator certification requirements during the three (3) year transition period?

A. If you are not a NYS certified Fire Investigator at the end of the three (3) year transition period, April 1, 2020, you will need to start the process over from the beginning. i.e. Attend the **INTRODUCTION TO FIRE INVESTIGATION** and **FIRE INVESTIGATION** courses in their entirety and perform the required hours of fire investigation field work.

Q. What do I need to do to maintain my Fire Investigation Certification?

A. Effective April 1, 2017, you must annually perform and document a minimum of 12 hours of tested instruction related to fire investigation, AND perform 12 hours of fire investigation field work. *This will apply to current, transition, or new candidates.* For purposes of documentation, a maximum of four (4) hours per incident will be accepted.

Q. As the Fire Chief, do I need to be certified as a Fire Investigator?

A. No. According to NYS GML 204-d, the fire chief shall determine, or cause to be determined, the cause of each fire or explosion which the fire department or company has been called to suppress. The fire chief may act as the fire investigator, however they can assign personnel or request assistance from another agency. The chief should insure that trained and certified personnel are used to make that determination.

Q. Does my department / company officer need to be a certified Fire Investigator?

A. No. There will be a six (6) hour **FIRE INVESTIGATION FOR THE LINE OFFICER** course for the department / company officers. They will gain a basic understanding of fire investigation, to meet the requirements of their positions, and learn when a certified fire investigator is needed.

Q. I was previously certified as a NYS Fire Investigator, but have not maintained my “in-service” requirements. What do I do?

A. You will need to start the process over again. See the above question, ***I’m just starting out and want to be a fire investigator, what must I do?***

Q. I work for a private sector business. Can I attend these courses and receive certification?

A. No, the Office of Fire Prevention and Control is statutorily authorized to provide training to local government fire service personnel. Fire investigator training and certification is a component of that authority. The statute allows for local government personnel, engaged in similar technical activities but representing non-fire related fields of endeavor, to receive and maintain specific training and certifications. Personnel in the employ of private companies may obtain training and certification through various professional organizations and other training programs.