



THE FIRE SCENE MAGAZINE

NEW YORK STATE CHAPTER OF THE IAAI

SPRING 2026

International Association of Arson Investigators, Inc.



IT IS HEREBY KNOWN THAT THE
New York Chapter
of the

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ARSON INVESTIGATORS, INC.

was founded April 21, 1976 at the Annual Meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana,
April 19-23, 1976

Be it in the minds of all members that the thought behind
such Chapter shall be to further the objectives of the I.A.A.I.

To unite for mutual benefit those officials and private
persons engaged in the control of Arson and kindred crimes.

To provide for exchange of technical information and developments.

To cooperate with other law enforcement agencies and associations
to further fire prevention and suppression of crime.

To encourage high professional standards of conduct among Arson
Investigators and to continually strive to eliminate all factors
which interfere with administration of crime suppression.

Said Chapter shall be vested with all the rights, benefits and obligations there-
unto pertaining, conferred and imposed by the Constitution and By-Laws of the Association.

In TESTIMONY WHEREOF, the officers of the International Association of Arson Investigators,
Inc. have affixed their names and seal this 21st day of April in the year 1976.

Chapter No. 23



W. R. Welburn, Jr.
PRESIDENT

R. E. May
SECRETARY

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President's Message

Scott A. Shear, IAAI-CFI (V)(M)

It is an honor and a privilege to address you as the newly elected President of the New York State Chapter 23 of the International Association of Arson Investigators. I want to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude for the trust and confidence you have placed in me. This organization is built on the commitment, professionalism, and passion of its members, and I am humbled to have the opportunity to help lead it forward.

As fire investigation continues to evolve—through advancements in technology, emerging fire patterns, and the growing need for multi-disciplinary collaboration, our mission remains clear: to elevate the standards of fire investigation, support our professionals through education and training, and promote integrity, scientific accuracy, and excellence in every facet of our work.

Over the coming year, my goals are to:

- Strengthen training and professional development, expanding both in person and digital learning opportunities. We will look to add to our annual Virtual Training to provide easy access to emerging trends.
- Enhance communication and outreach, ensuring members across the state feel connected, informed, and supported. We have already increased our social media presence on Facebook and LinkedIn.
- Support investigators at every stage of their careers, from new investigators to seasoned professionals.
- Deepen partnerships with law enforcement, fire services, laboratories, legal professionals, and allied agencies.

None of this can be accomplished alone. The success of our chapter relies on the collective effort of our board, our committee members, and each of you. I look forward to working together, welcoming new ideas, and building on the strong foundation established by the leaders who came before me. President Robin has left us in a good spot and built our chapter into one of the greatest in the organization.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve. I am proud to stand alongside you as we continue advancing the fire investigation profession throughout New York State.

Respectfully,

Scott A. Shear, IAAI-CFI(V)(M)

President

History of the NYS IAAI

The annual meeting of the International Association of Arson Investigators was held in Indianapolis, Indiana, April 19-23, 1976. At that meeting, the Association founded its twenty-third state chapter. On April 21, 1976, under the signature of IAAI President W. R. Wetherington and Secretary R.E. May, the New York State Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators was formed to further the objectives of the larger association. Charter members of the New York State Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators included:

- Robert Doran, Nassau County
- Donald Devore, Orange County
- George Alexander, Greene County
- Alton L. Lewis, Onondaga County
- Richard B. Whalen, Niagara County
- Charles Houper, Steuben County
- Francis X. Pendl, Nassau County
- R. Larry Christman, Oswego County
- Richard Manwaring, Nassau County
- John P. Woods, Yates County
- Miller Butler, Onondaga County
- James Holmes, Nassau County
- Thomas C. Disbrow, Yates County
- Richard Olmstead, Suffolk County
- Harold Glass, Orange County
- Daniel J. O'Connor, Rensselaer County
- Robert Cocks, Nassau County
- Joseph F. Jaret, Suffolk County
- Wilbur A. Sterling, Suffolk County



We are indebted to these individuals for establishing the foundation on which we operate to this day, and we continue our efforts to further the objectives of the International Association of Arson Investigators.



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Gas Detectors and Fire Investigations

Jeff Pauley MS, IAAI-CFI® (ret.)

Past Chairman of the IAAI Health & Safety Committee

There are many public and some private fire investigators who carry and use gas detection devices. Sometimes it is a single gas detector, and sometimes it is a multi-gas detector. NFPA 1010 requires gas detector training for Firefighter 1 in the U.S., so if you are a fire investigator who was trained as a firefighter, you should know how to use this equipment if you have it available to you. But what about the fire investigators who are not firefighters? NFPA 921 (2024), Section 13.8.1, discusses using gas detectors to monitor certain scenes. But I cannot find any references to training on this equipment other than what is noted above. What training are you giving or receiving, if any, for gas detection equipment beyond reading the manual?

The primary purpose of gas detection equipment is to determine whether IDLH conditions are present. In the U.S., OSHA defines Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health (IDLH) as “an atmospheric concentration of any toxic, corrosive, or asphyxiant substance that poses an immediate threat to life or would cause irreversible or delayed adverse health effects or would interfere with an individual’s ability to escape from a dangerous atmosphere” (29 CFR-1910.120). NIOSH developed the IDLH air concentration values to determine respiratory protection levels.¹ For other countries, you need to know what applies to you, or use the sources above.

Gas meters are best used to determine whether an IDLH concentration of toxicants is present. **There should be no investigation activities when IDLH is present!**

There was (and, sadly, perhaps still is) a belief in the fire service that carbon monoxide (CO) readings were correlated with other gas levels,

and that a low CO reading after suppression meant the air was safe. The Phoenix studies in the late 1990s thoroughly disproved this. A low reading of one substance is NOT indicative of low readings across the board, and, therefore, a litmus test to determine that it is safe to remove SCBA.²

The primary use of gas detection equipment at the post-fire scene involves non-permit-required confined spaces. This is a space that does not contain, or, with respect to atmospheric hazards, is not likely to contain, any hazard capable of causing death or serious physical harm. The goal here is to ensure the atmosphere in the space is not oxygen-deficient. **There should be no investigation activities in a permit-required confined space!**



Figure 1: Crawl Space Fire Example

The normal oxygen level of the Earth’s atmosphere is 20.8% oxygen (O₂), so, to make things simpler, let us say oxygen comprises 1/5 of the atmosphere. The critical thing to remember here is that oxygen does not just disappear; something must take its place. An oxygen-deficient atmosphere is defined as having oxygen

¹See this link for a good overview <https://response.restoration.noaa.gov/oil-and-chemical-spills/chemical-spills/resources/immediately-dangerous-life-health-limits-idlhs.html#:~:text=IDLH%20limits%20are%20workplace%20exposure%20limits%20that,which%20healthy%20adult%20workers%20could%20be%20exposed.>

²Bolstad-Johnson, D. EXPOSED Carcinogenic Exposures on the Fireground and 11 Work Practices to Minimize the Risk, 2018

levels below 19.5%. A 1% reduction is equivalent to 10,000 ppm, but remember that oxygen is only 1/5 of the atmosphere, so the actual change is 50,000 ppm. Since oxygen is only 1/5 of the atmosphere and asphyxiants do not discriminate against which gases they displace, you must assume it is displacing ALL atmospheric gases, meaning you must multiply the original 10,000 ppm by 5. That means that if you have a 1% lower reading, 50,000 ppm of something is displacing the oxygen. If your meter is set at 19.8% and has dropped by 1.0% from your normal background reading, it probably will not alert! You must identify this displacement substance before making any entry.³ This is why it is essential to know how your meter works and how to operate it properly.

When opening a confined space below the fire area, such as a crawl space, to take an atmospheric reading, it is imperative to wear an SCBA because the gas hazards are unknown at that point.

Hydrogen sulfide is heavier than air, so it is likely to accumulate in crawl spaces. It is highly toxic and an inhalation hazard. Very insoluble gases, such as hydrogen sulfide, efficiently pass through the respiratory tract, are taken up by the pulmonary blood supply, and are distributed throughout the body, where they induce toxicity and injury.

Investigators should consider the risks versus the rewards of entering any confined space.

There are other issues regarding meters in the post-fire environment. There are over 100 toxic substances in the near-term post-fire environment; it is impossible to test for all of them, and there is currently no field test for particulates. Meters must be regularly calibrated, and the users must be appropriately trained in their use. Most meters have warning and action alert levels. Suppose a meter is set to detect a substance with an alert level of 4.7 ppm and an action level of 5 ppm. Workers could be exposed to an atmosphere containing 4.6 ppm of that substance all day and remain unaware of it based on the meter reading, which could well exceed the permissible exposure limit. While this may not be true for every meter type, it is for some, and that can be a problem.

Remember: a low-level exposure for a long duration and a high-level exposure for a short duration are equally bad for you!

Lastly, every meter has a T90 response time for each sensor. This is how long it takes for the meter to display 90% of the actual concentration. It could be ten seconds or three minutes. This means you need to fully understand how YOUR meter works! According to Dawn Bolstad-Johnson (retired Phoenix FD industrial hygienist), "All fires are toxic events, and we can no longer dismiss them as a minimal threat." This holds for the post-fire environment as well.

³See <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/my-meter-isnt-going-off-so-im-safe-right-wellnot-fast-drew-hinton/> for more information.





Central Zone

Vice President
Joseph Galloway, IAAI-CFI

It is with a heavy heart that we share the passing of Investigator W. Brian Wydra. Brian was a long-time investigator, starting his investigation career with the Rochester Fire Department and later as a private investigator with his own firm. Brian worked with many public and private agencies and investigators in the Central region and across the state. He will be remembered for his kindness and loyalty to our profession. Please keep Brian's family and friends in your thoughts and prayers.



NFPA 921 Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations. Current edition 2024. Next edition 2027.

- First draft report posting September 23, 2025
- Public comment closed January 7, 2026
- Public comments available online now
- Second draft meeting April 7, 2026
- Second draft report posting October 5, 2026

Please get involved and stay up to date on the standards that govern our certification and Fire Investigation practices.

Please don't hesitate to contact me to schedule an *NFPA 1321* or *CV and the Courtroom* presentation for your investigation team. We are always available to attend your county or team meeting to discuss the chapter, answer any questions, or bring any of our training programs to your team. Email me at centralvice@nyfireinvestigators.org to discuss or set up a date and time.

Certification Reminders

All certification applications and testing are now online

Instructions and applications are available at firearson.com

The Marine Fire Endorsement is now available

The Chapter will assist any member working through the certification process

Keeping up with the standards of our profession

NFPA 1033 Standard for Professional Qualifications for Fire Investigator. Current edition 2022. Next edition 2027.

- Second draft posting March 3, 2026
- Second draft available online now
- Notice of intent to Make a Motion (NITMAM) closing date November 6, 2026

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See the QR code and sponsorship link.

Support Us!

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The NYS IAAI is a non-profit organization formed 50 years ago to provide technical training, networking opportunities, and professional development for fire investigation and insurance professionals throughout New York State. Every year, NYS IAAI offers numerous fire and explosion investigation training opportunities, professional networking, and access to critical professional development resources. Our 750+ members include fire investigators, police investigators, engineers, attorneys, insurance representatives, chemists, canine handlers, college students, and various subject matter experts.

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Magazine Sponsor – Front and back cover banner advertising on the magazine, advertising on our social media, choice of booth space at annual Presidential Reception, event recognition as Magazine Sponsor, 25% off tuition for seminar registration, and subscription to our award-winning magazine. Contributions of \$5,000 and greater.



Eastern Zone

Vice President
Phil Brousseau

As the cold and snow continue to grip the Northeast, thoughts of spring and upcoming training opportunities will help distract us from the brutal weather we are experiencing.

One such training opportunity is our Spring Seminar, which will be held on May 6-8, 2026, at the Saratoga Springs City Center. Registration information is available on our website. Please save the date and plan on attending.

This year's seminar will have some major changes. The annual Membership Meeting, President's Reception, and awards ceremony will be held in conjunction with our May Seminar. Our elections will continue to be conducted electronically in November.

To keep our Constitution current with the most recent changes, the following amendments are proposed:

- Change to Article III: Change to officers & directors' term of office beginning and end dates
- Change to Article VI: Nomination Committee notification of nominee's time frame change
- Change to Article VIII: Submitting amendments time frame change

A copy of the proposed amendments is available for review on our website and on pages 22-23.. The electronic voting period will run from April 19-26, 2026.



NYS IAAI uses a variety of social media platforms to keep you informed of Chapter changes, upcoming training opportunities, developments in the fire investigation field, and other relevant trends or research. You can find us on the following social media platforms:

Website: nyfireinvestigators.org

Facebook: facebook.com/nysiaai23

LinkedIn: New York State Chapter of IAAI

Please find us and follow us on Facebook and LinkedIn.

We are always looking for volunteers to assist us with our various committees and activities. Please get in touch with your zone Vice President to learn more about our committees and upcoming events or to volunteer.

As a service to you, the NYS IAAI offers outreach training and education in the following areas: NFPA 1321 and Curriculum Vitae (CV). Don't hesitate to reach out to your Vice President or Director for assistance.

As always, stay safe, dress for the weather, stay hydrated, and feel free to contact me at any time with news and events in your area.

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Using AI When Building Fire Investigation Timelines

Dr. Trevor Maynard, PE

Dixon Robin, IAAI-CFI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is fundamentally changing the nature of fire investigation. When applied correctly, AI may help investigators to identify more usable data, build analyses with greater accuracy, fight bias, and test hypotheses.

However, integrating this technology into our workflow requires us to figure out how to avoid misuse and bias, ensure its usage complies with legal and regulatory standards, and to always verify its output. Most importantly, we must ensure that AI does not replace the fire investigator's expert opinion.

In this article, we will focus strictly on how AI is being used to construct, review, or deconstruct fire investigation timelines. It is important to understand AI's core functions, but the discussion of specifically how AI is used in other parts of the fire investigation beyond timelines, such as report writing or scene analysis, will be left to another day.

The "Prediction Machine": What AI Is and Isn't

To use AI effectively, it is critical to understand what is actually happening under the hood. At their core, the neural networks behind some AI platforms aren't "thinking" systems - they are highly sophisticated prediction machines that analyze patterns in massive amounts of training data and calculate the most statistically likely word, pixel, or outcome based on what they've seen before.

When an AI model processes an image, it doesn't "see" it the way we do. It starts by converting the image into a numerical representation (a process called tokenization) and then feeds those numbers through multiple layers of simple calculation units called "neurons". Each neuron takes the numbers it receives from the prior neurons, gives some of them more importance than others (these are called weights), adds everything together, and passes the result to the next layer. Essentially, the weights control

how much each piece of information matters in producing the final answer. During training, the model compares its final prediction to the correct answer and measures the error. It then uses this error to adjust the model weights (a process called backpropagation). After repeating this process using many examples, the model gradually tunes itself to produce increasingly accurate predictions.

Crucially, the AI does not "know" what a car, a moped, or a brick is. It simply compares the input to other pictures of cars and bricks and detects similar patterns. The same is true for text or video images (think of the things we use for timeline data). Large Language Models (LLMs) are neural networks that find patterns of speech and text, including relationships between words. If an AI sees a CAD log entry like "12:31:01 PM | ALARM ZONE 001 | SMOKE DETECTOR ACTIVATION", it tokenizes the text and uses pattern recognition to predict that 12:31 is a clock time, "activation" means a sensor turned on, and "alarm zone" is a location in a building. It is just pattern detection from a massive amount of data. If it has not been "trained" to recognize a pattern, it will have difficulty providing an accurate answer to the user.

Building Investigative Timelines with AI

One of the most powerful uses of AI in fire investigation is analyzing and constructing timelines from video, CAD logs, 911 calls, witness statements, IoT data, and more. The role of AI with timelines is to simply identify potential data, sort timeline data, and identify gaps or inconsistencies in the timeline. Users are cautioned that the role of AI should not be to render an opinion or provide an analysis of origin and cause based on the timeline. More specifically, fire investigators can leverage the power of AI to:

- Identify and extract potential timeline data from files and documents
- Compile timeline data from an array of diverse data sources into one master timeline

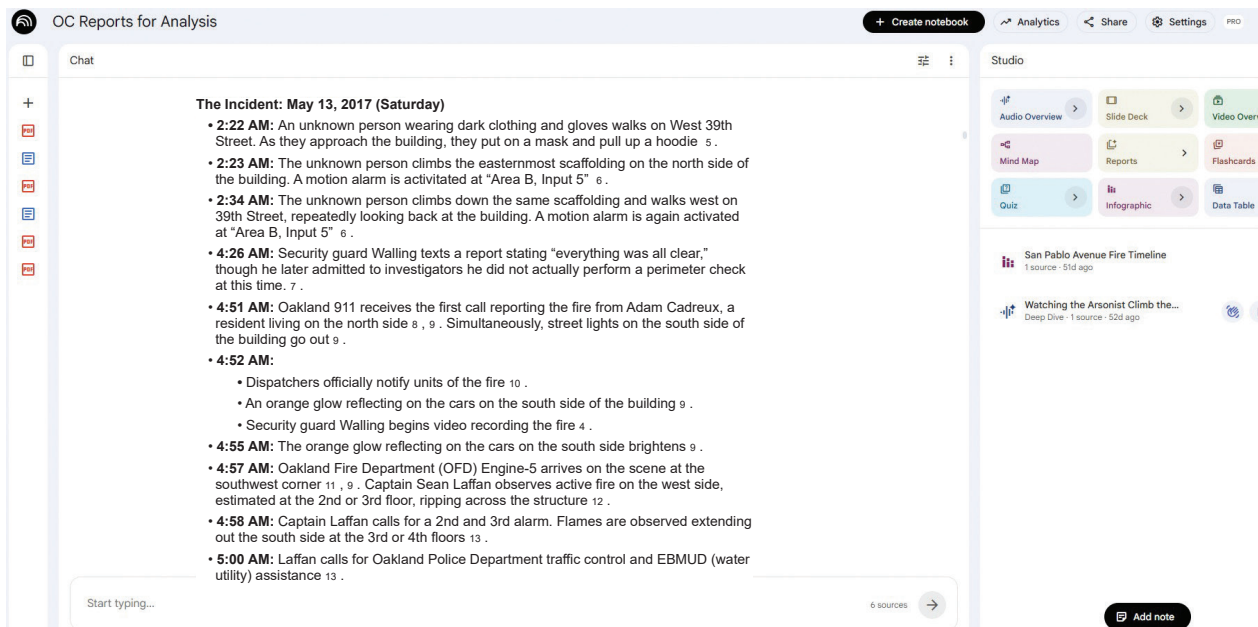


Figure 1: Screenshot of Notebook LM used for data extraction while building an investigative timeline by prompting it to extract timeline data from the selected PDF document.

- Review a timeline for accuracy or consistency with other reports
- Prepare the expert for testimony about the timeline

Notably, these actions are only as successful as the question, called a “prompt”, that is asked of the AI. Like a child, AI can only respond to what you ask and how clearly you ask it. The amount of detail needed in an effective, clear, and concise prompt (to get accurate results) cannot be overstated. A vague prompt forces the model to guess, while a precise prompt lets you control the task, the boundaries, and the format of the answer. Even worse, poorly written prompts can increase the likelihood of inaccurate outputs.

For example, when pulling data from raw documents, prompts should be narrow and specific. You must specify the allowed sources (“only from the text below”) and explicitly forbid guessing (“Do not add events or times”). You can instruct the AI to extract all time-stamped events and present them in a table with columns for Time, Event, Source, and whether the time is exact or approximate. Any identified data identified by AI in this process needs verification/validation by the user – meaning the user cannot assume complete accuracy of any result from AI! Even when you ask AI to simply re-frame your existing data into a different format, it is still generating predictions to

complete that task. It isn’t “copying and pasting” data - it’s predicting what the reformatted output should look like based on the input and its prior training. Any AI-generated output carries some risk of error, even in basic tasks.

When compiling lists of timeline data from different sources, you can ask the AI to merge them into one master timeline. You should instruct the AI to sort by time, define a master table format, and flag—not fix—any conflicts or gaps.

When reviewing timelines for accuracy and completeness, AI can be an excellent tool for quality checks. You can prompt the AI to look for internal inconsistencies (impossible sequences or overlaps), identify unusually large time gaps (such as between dispatch and arrival), and check source clarity. When doing this, you must remind the AI that its job is to critique the timeline, not to propose an origin or cause of the fire. You must also be aware that these AI-identified inconsistencies may be incorrect and must be verified by reviewing the original data.

As is explained below, the investigator must be careful about their prompts, including the inputs and outputs with the AI platform, as they will likely be discoverable and require explanation when testifying.

The Regulatory Landscape: NFPA 921 and Legal Compliance

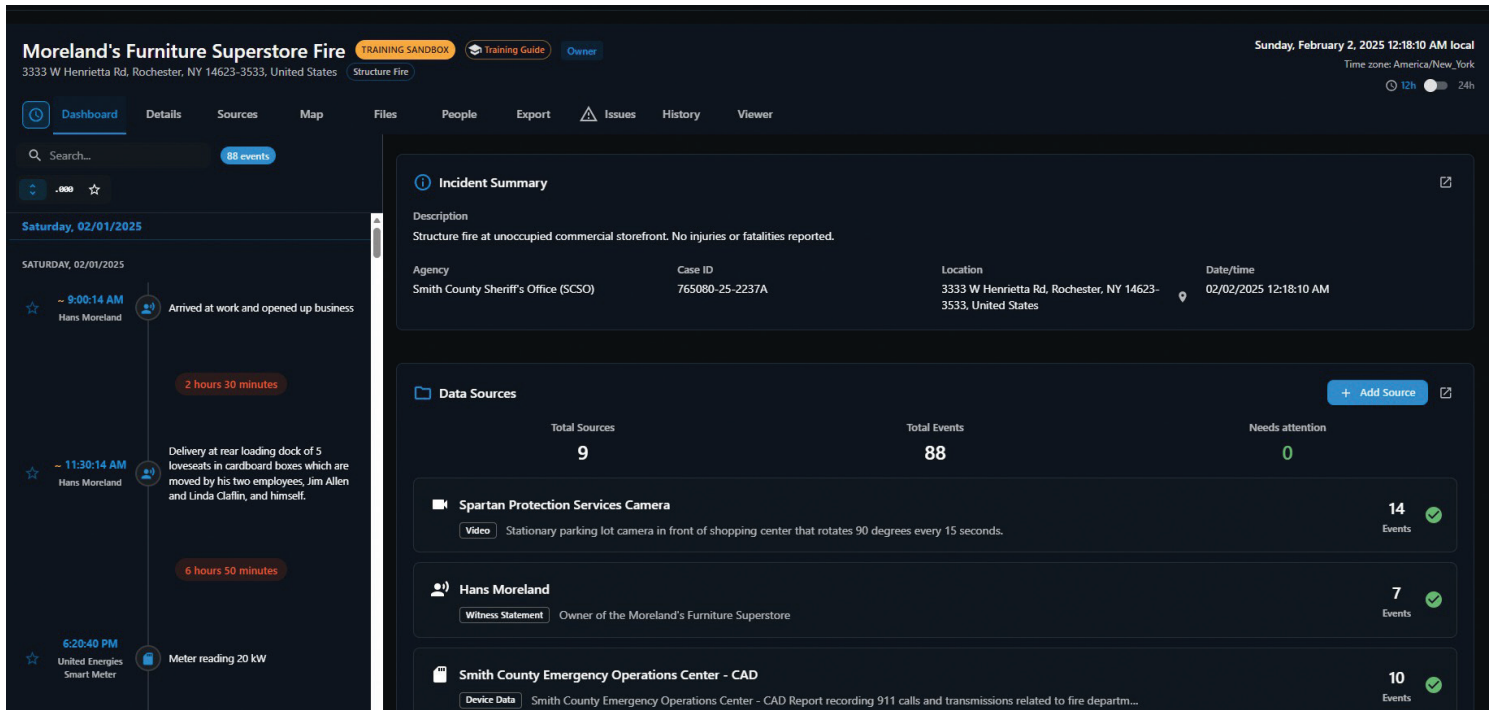


Figure 2: Screenshot of software used for data extraction while building an investigative timeline

The use of AI is under scrutiny by standard-making bodies and lawmakers. The upcoming 2027 Edition of NFPA 921 will feature new language in section 21.7 specifically addressing AI. Under the new guidelines, per the second draft of the 2027 edition as published on NFPA's website, investigators should document specific AI tools employed, how they were used, and their impact on hypothesis generation. It emphasizes that validation of AI-generated results through expert analysis is essential, there is no presumption that AI results are inherently objective, and investigators must maintain an audit trail.

Legal regulations are also catching up. For example, effective January 1, 2026, California Penal Code section 13663 will require any official report generated by a law enforcement agency using AI to include a specified disclosure statement and the author's signature. Furthermore, the author must retain specific records, including early drafts and audit trails.

Creating an Audit Trail and Managing Privacy

If you use AI, human verification may be the most important part of the process. This, coupled with following the AI-use rules and regulations that guide your organization and being transparent about your specific use, makes up the foundation

for responsible AI use.

If you use AI extensively, like providing a scanned PDF file and asking it to identify and sort potential timeline data in it, you will be obligated to document your prompts, document the inputs and outputs, and provide discovery of such efforts. This "audit trail" will be important as you testify in court to the timeline and how it was built.

One way to do this is to employ an AI Usage Log to record:

- Date and time the tool was used, and the specific AI tool (e.g., ChatGPT, Perplexity)
- The purpose of the AI use
- Input data provided
- The exact prompt used
- The output created
- Notes on independent human verification of results, proving that you cross-checked the events against the source documents and that AI added no new facts.

If you relied on the output, best practice dictates saving both your prompt and the tool's full response into a document within your case file (e.g., saving a PDF of the chat history).

A standard disclaimer can be included in the origin and cause report (or any investigative product, for that matter). Still, it is advisable to check with your agency and/or clients before doing so. There may be reasons not to include such a disclaimer, and the language used in the disclaimer must be compiled very deliberately.

Many fire investigations involve sensitive information, whether it is related to a high-profile criminal investigation, personal identifiers, or graphic images. The use of AI by fire investigators must always involve the consideration of whether the material being uploaded is sensitive, whether it should be disclosed, and whether it is appropriate for an AI platform to be able to use it to “train” future models.

While tools like ChatGPT and Perplexity offer “Incognito” or temporary chat modes that do not save conversation history or use data for training, this does not mean the data will not be seen by other humans..

Preparing for Testimony

When taking the stand, opposing counsel will undoubtedly probe your use of AI. They may ask if you know how the AI works internally, whether it can invent information, and what steps you took to verify the output. Your goal is to clearly explain, when asked, the scope and transparency of your AI use. You must make it clear that the AI organized the data, but you interpreted it. A strong, defensible testimony regarding AI timeline generation should follow this step-by-step logic:

1. “First, I manually extracted all times and events from the 911 records, run sheets, and witness statements into a draft table.”
2. “Second, I used the tool to re-format that information and to highlight any internal contradictions.”
3. “Third, I ignored any new events, times, or characterizations that did not match something in the underlying records.”
4. “Fourth, I re-checked every entry in the final timeline against the original sources before relying on it for my origin and cause opinion.”

Conclusion

AI is an incredibly powerful formatting and checking tool. By properly structuring prompts, adhering to the latest NFPA standards, maintaining



Figure 3: Screenshot of footage from a recent arson homicide trial in which the fire marshal testified as to his use of AI to review his report prior to trial.

strict audit trails, and keeping origin and cause opinions, as well as overall analysis, firmly in the hands of the human expert, fire investigators can harness this technology safely and effectively to build reliable timelines. The ability to harness the power does not mean a free ride – fire investigators will still spend considerable time verifying results and analyzing responses – but it does mean that investigations can ingest much more data and process it more efficiently.

Authors' Disclosures: This article was developed with some assistance from AI. The authors provided source material they had originally created and then used an AI platform to produce an initial draft summary of that material. The authors then independently reviewed, revised, and expanded that draft, making substantive edits, additions, and deletions to ensure the final content reflects the authors' own analysis and judgment. In addition, the authors are co-founders of TimeScene, a software application that manages investigative timelines and uses AI-assisted functions to identify and extract potential timeline data. In addition, TimeScene is a sponsor of NYS IAAI.



Western Zone

Vice President
Rick Cary

Greetings from the Western Zone

I hope this update finds everyone well.

My Name Is Rick Cary, and I am the new Vice President of the Western Zone. As I begin my journey in this new position, I would like to share a bit about myself.

My career in the fire service began in 1988 as a volunteer with the Holley Fire Department, now part of the Murray Joint Fire District. Over the years, I have gained extensive experience across various roles in both line and civil positions, culminating in my current role as District Chief. This background reflects my dedication and broad understanding of fire service operations.

In 1990, I began a career with the Eastman Kodak Company Fire Department, where I held the positions of Firefighter, Training Specialist,

Lieutenant, and Battalion Chief until 2017. I left Kodak to pursue my options with the New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control. Originally, I was assigned to the Syracuse Office, where I conducted Inspections of College campuses, group homes, and state-owned facilities in that region. In 2019, I transferred to the Fire Investigation Branch, assigned from Montour Falls, where I assisted with Fire Investigation Technical Assistance to Counties and with the Instruction of the Fire Investigator Class, as well as other outreach classes. In 2022, I was awarded the opportunity to become a K9 handler and was paired up with a 1-year-old Chocolate Lab named Jax. Since 2022, Jax and I have assisted with origin and cause investigations across New York State.

When Scott Shear approached me in the fall about the Vice President role in the Western Region, I was shocked and honored to be considered for the position. My extensive experience in fire investigation, training, and leadership, spanning from volunteer ranks to Battalion Chief, equips me to contribute effectively. I look forward to working with everyone soon, and if I can be of any assistance, please reach out to me at westvice@nyfireinvestigators.org



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Wednesday, May 6th – 6 hours

Complex Fire Scene Investigations

Jason Mardirosian – Fire Investigation Training Group

- Sponsored lunch

Ridgeway Ave Case Study - ATF/Rochester Arson Task Force

Special Agent Stacey Hull – ATF

- NYS IAAI General Membership Meeting
- Sponsored networking event

Thursday, May 7th – 8 hours

Fire Dynamics for the Fire Investigator with HOT (Hands-On Training)

Jamie Lord, PE – Reax Engineering

- Sponsored lunch
- Sponsored social event

Friday, May 8th – 4 hours

Insurance Fraud Arson Investigation Case Study

Orleans County Emergency Management

A Look at the Past - and What We Should Have Learned

Jerry Nalis – Technical Fire Services

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Training and Education

The Training & Education Committee has been busy organizing and delivering great training classes to our members this spring season. In February, we hosted the IAAI Fire Investigator Safety Officer course in Orange County. This advanced-level training course was designed for experienced fire investigators preparing to serve as a Fire Investigation Safety Officer or take on safety leadership roles at large or complex post-fire scenes. Whether functioning as a dedicated safety officer or in a dual role, students were trained in safety management, risk assessment, and incident command systems specific to fire-investigation scenes.

The course features up-to-date safety protocols from multiple authoritative sources and integrates FEMA ICS Safety Officer content. We were honored to have past-president Dixon Robin instruct this course for us. His delivery and knowledge of the subject are always well received by attendees.



Fire Investigator Safety Officer, February 2026

The Chapter once again offered an Expert Witness Courtroom Testimony class, held this time in Albany, NY, at the Albany Fire Department and Albany County Courtroom. Seven public and private investigators from our Chapter participated in the training and trial event and successfully completed the training. The Expert Witness Courtroom Testimony course walks you through what it's like to testify as an expert witness in a real case. During the class, you will spend time with actual attorneys giving your deposition,



preparing for your testimony, and spending the day in a courtroom where you will take the stand for direct examination and cross-examination.



Expert Witness: Michael Coluzza presenting Sworn Testimony

If you have never been called upon as an Expert Witness, this class will give you the opportunity to better understand the monumental task of preparing for court and then experience testifying in a real courtroom environment with actual attorneys.

The classroom portion of the course covers: Legal System Overview; Court Rules and Case Law; Qualifying as an Expert and Standing by Your Curriculum Vitae; and How to Write and Present Your Opinion Analysis.

The court preparation portion covers: The Practical Exercise; Court Exhibits: How to Present and what should be included; Presentation of Evidence: Best Practices; and Working with an Attorney.

Southeastern Vice President James Cuffe is the program facilitator, and we thank him for his time and expertise.

On May 5, before our Spring Seminar, we are hosting an Evidence Collection Technician practicum held at the Hampton Inn, Saratoga Springs, NY. 10 students will be evaluated on their evidence-collection skills and tested for the

IAAI-ECT certification. The Evidence Collection Technician Program verifies an applicant's fundamental knowledge against the core job performance requirements (JPR) of established professional qualifications standards and industry practices related to evidence collection at fire scenes. This measurement is not all-inclusive of the cited professional standards but lays the foundation for assessing the holder's fundamental ability to perform specific evidence-collection tasks related to fire scene investigation at an

acceptable level, as measured against published acceptable practices. We have held this course several times a year in different regions of the state. If you or a group of investigators from your department or company are hoping to obtain this certification, please reach out to the T & E Committee at training@nyfireinvestigators.org

Rick Cary

Western VP, and Training & Education Chairman



Pictured l-r: James Cuffe, Carl Tattoli, Jr., Kyle Toth, Dwayne Defino, Michael Urban, Nick Fletcher, Will Lamar, Christopher Apa, Gregory Howe, ADA Stephen Lydon, (Back row): Judge Holly Trexler





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Southern Zone

Vice President
Matt Cady

Greetings from the Southern Zone,

Let me introduce myself: I have been a fire investigator-in-training since 1989. I believe that, even with all our qualifications, we are all investigators in training. Just because we have certificates doesn't mean we stop learning how to do our jobs better, more accurately, and with new technologies.

I joined the Dutchess County Fire Investigation Division in 2000. After completing more training and becoming a Pro Board-Certified Investigator, I was promoted in 2014 to Deputy Fire Coordinator and Assistant Chief of the Fire Investigation Division. Past Southern Zone Vice President Peter Davis suggested that I pursue further investigative certifications such as the IAAI-CFI and NAFI-CFEI. I completed the prerequisites and paperwork to take the NAFI and IAAI certification tests, and I received my certifications in 2024. I am presently employed by Davis Fire Debris Analysis LLC. as a Certified Fire & Explosion Investigator and take pride in my work.

My goal in serving as Vice President is to hear from our members in the Southern zone counties of Otsego, Schoharie, Delaware, Greene, Ulster, Sullivan, Orange, Putnam, and Dutchess. If our members have any suggestions for hands-on training, virtual offerings, or other resources, I would appreciate hearing from you.

2026 is the 50th anniversary of the New York State IAAI Chapter 23. We are excited to announce that, in honor of this anniversary, we will offer new merchandise at the Spring Seminar in Saratoga Springs. If you cannot attend the seminar, I urge you to take a look at our merchandise page, nyfireinvestigators.org/merchandise, for these anniversary items, including shirts, a new challenge coin, hats, stickers, and more.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate and welcome our new chapter President, Scott Shear. Scott has a vision to keep moving our chapter forward, which builds on the wonderful work he has done with the training and education committee in the past. We look forward to more! I would also like to thank past President Dixon Robin for his many years of leadership and for executing his vision to make Chapter 23 a great asset to all New York State Fire Investigators. I speak for all of us in Chapter 23 as I wish him well in all his future endeavors. Lastly, I express my gratitude to the former Southern Zone Vice-President, Karl Vollmer, for his work over the last four years. Karl's professionalism can only be beaten by his comedic side, which we will miss at our meetings. Karl, good luck, and we will see you at our seminars.

I am proud to say that I am still an investigator-in-training, and I hope you all will join me in that endeavor. Please keep learning about the always-changing, dynamic profession to which we belong. It is my goal that this continued pursuit of knowledge brings you pride in calling yourselves certified fire investigators.

Stay Safe and Keep Learning!

Matt

southvice@nyfireinvestigators.org





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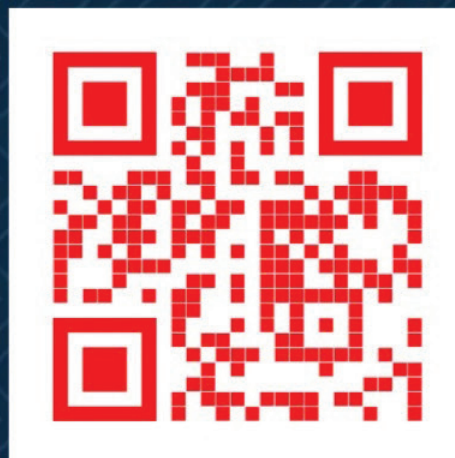


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NYS IAAI

Proposed amendments to the Constitution and By-laws

The following is a proposed amendment to the Constitution and By-Laws

- Article III – Officers – Responsibilities, Elections and Terms
 - Section 3 – Terms of Office

Currently reads:

- A. The President, Vice Presidents, and Sergeant-at-Arms shall hold office for a term of two (2) years from the time of their election, or until the election and affirmation of their successors.
- B. The Secretary/Treasurer shall hold office for a term of three (3) years from the time of their election, or until the election and affirmation of their successor.
- C. Members of the Board shall hold office for a term of three (3) years from the time of their election. Their terms shall be arranged so that at least two (2) retire each year.

Shall be amended to read as follows:

- A. The President, Vice Presidents, and Sergeant-at-Arms shall hold office for a term of two (2) years. **The term of office shall begin on January 1st of the calendar year immediately following their election.**
- B. The Secretary/Treasurer shall hold office for a term of three (3) years. **The term of office shall begin on January 1st of the calendar year immediately following their election.**
- C. Members of the Board shall hold office for a term of three (3) years. **The term of office shall begin on January 1st of the calendar year immediately following their election.** Their terms shall be arranged so that at least two (2) retire each year.

Proposed changes in **RED**

Proposed amendments to the Constitution and By-laws

The following is a proposed amendment to the Constitution and By-Laws:

- Article VI-Standing Committees
 - Section 1 – Standing Committees
 - Subsection D – Nominating

Currently reads:

The committee shall encourage, solicit, receive, and determine eligibility of all nominees for the various officer and director positions of the Chapter. The committee shall present all qualified nominees to the Board by October 1 each year and to the membership at least one (1) week prior to the general meeting. The committee shall coordinate with the ELECTION committee as necessary for contested races.

Shall be amended to read as follows:

The committee shall encourage, solicit, receive, and determine eligibility of all nominees for the various officer and director positions of the Chapter. **The committee shall present all qualified nominees to the Board of Directors at least thirty (30) days prior to the start of electronic voting** and to the membership at least one (1) week prior to the **start of electronic voting**. The committee shall coordinate with the ELECTION committee as necessary for contested races.

Proposed changes in **RED**

Proposed amendments to the Constitution and By-laws

The following is a proposed amendment to the Constitution and By-Laws:

- Article VIII - Amendment
 - Section 1 – Requirements
 - Subsection A

Currently reads

Section 1 – Requirements

The Constitution and By-Laws may be amended by a two-thirds (2/3) affirmative vote tally of the members electronically voting for the amendment, provided:


- A. The proposed amendment is presented in a form consistent with, and without conflict to, the remainder of the existing Constitution and shall be submitted by October 1st, prior to the Annual General Meeting, in a manner prescribed by the Constitution and By-Laws Committee.

Shall be amended to read as follows:

- A. The proposed amendment is presented in a form consistent with, and without conflict to, the remainder of the existing Constitution and shall be submitted **no later than thirty (30) days prior to the start of electronic voting**, in a manner prescribed by the Constitution and By-Laws Committee

Proposed changes in **RED**

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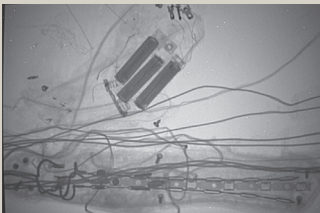

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Southeastern Zone

Vice President
Jim Cuffe, IAAI-CFI

Greetings from the Southeastern Zone,

I hope you're all well as you receive this Spring edition of our Chapter magazine.

I wanted to provide a reminder and an update on the committees I oversee for the Chapter.

- **Membership:** We are fortunate that our numbers continue to rise, and we have almost 800 members! If you have questions about your membership or know someone who would like to join our group, have them contact membership@nyfireinvestigators.org. We'll certainly work to help you as best as we can.
- **Elections:** We completed our second election in November for our Board member seats using online voting. And we also put forth a vote on some amendments to our Constitution and By-Laws earlier this spring. This online process has been a successful improvement for our Chapter, and we hope more members vote each time.
- **Ethical Practices and Grievances:** No news for this committee, but if you have a complaint that you would like to file, please email contact@nyfireinvestigators.org

We completed an offering of the IAAI/ATF Fire Investigation Safety Officer training in Orange County in February. Much thanks to Vini Tankasali, Fire Coordinator, Deputy Commissioner of

Emergency Services, and Jamie Rohner at the Orange County Emergency Services, Division of Fire Services, Fire Training Center, for their assistance and use of their facility. They are a great group and were fantastic to work with to get this class accomplished!

We provided another IAAI Expert Witness Courtroom Testimony course, this time in Albany. Another group of students was challenged to present their investigative opinions in court. It was a tough course for sure, but they all completed it – and learned a little bit, too. A big thank you to the Albany Fire Department and to Chief Joseph Gregory for his assistance and use of their firehouse. Many thanks also go to the Albany County Office of the District Attorney, Lee C. Kindlon, and Chief Investigator/Director of Operations, Adam Hornick, for all their help in arranging for the courtroom, attorneys, and judge to facilitate the testimony portion of the course. Nice job to all!

Plans are also in the works for a class in the Long Island area later this year. More info to follow as the details get worked out. If you are looking for specific training classes in your area within the Southeastern Zone, please contact the Training and Education Committee at training@nyfireinvestigators.org and copy me.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or need assistance from the Chapter. We are here for our membership and are ready to lend a hand when we can.

Keep up the good work and continue to support your fellow fire investigators.

Stay safe,
Jim

southeastvice@nyfireinvestigators.org



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- 2 A second hood should be provided to all entry-certified personnel in the department.
Following exit from the IDLH, and while still on air, you should begin immediate gross decon of PPE using soap water and a brush, if weather conditions allow. PPE should then be placed into a sealed plastic bag and placed in an exterior compartment of the rig, or if responding in POVs, placed in a large storage tote, thus keeping the off-gassing PPE away from passengers and self.
- 3 After completion of gross decon procedures as discussed above, and while still on scene, the exposed areas of the body (neck, face, arms and hands) should be wiped off immediately using wipes, which must be carried on all apparatus. Use the wipes to remove as much soot as possible from head, neck, jaw, throat, underarms and hands immediately.
- 4 Change your clothes and wash them after exposure to products of combustion or other contaminants. Do this as soon as possible and/or isolate in a trash bag until washing is available.
- 5 Shower as soon as possible after being exposed to products of combustion or other contaminants. "Shower within the Hour"
- 6 PPE, especially turnout pants, must be prohibited in areas outside the apparatus floor (i.e. kitchen, sleeping areas, etc.) and never in the household.
- 7 Wipes, or soap and water, should also be used to decontaminate and clean apparatus seats, SCBA and interior crew area regularly, especially after incidents where personnel were exposed to products of combustion.
- 8 Get an annual physical, as early detection is the key to survival. The NVFC outlines several options at www.nvfc.org. "A Healthcare Provider's Guide to Firefighter Physicals" can be downloaded from www.iafc.org/healthRoadmap.
- 9 Tobacco products of any variety, including dip and e-cigarettes should never be used at anytime on or off duty.
- 10 Fully document ALL fire or chemical exposures on incident reports and personal exposure reports.

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