



# GENERAL ORDER

Loudoun County Sheriff's Office

**Chapter:** Operations

**Section:** 409.18

**Subject:** Specialized Units

**Topic:** Arson/Fatal Fire Task Force

**Enacted:** 07/30/2015

**Last Review:** 04/01/2021

**Review:** 04/01/2022

## I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this General Order is to establish the Loudoun County Fire Investigation Task Force. The task force is a joint effort between Loudoun County Fire and Rescue, Loudoun County Sheriff's Office, Virginia State Police, Leesburg Town Police Department, Purcellville Town Police Department, and Middleburg Town Police Department. This approach best utilizes the training and expertise of the various law enforcement agencies for a thorough and joint investigation.

## II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Loudoun County Sheriff to support and assist with the investigation of any fire occurring in Loudoun County and its incorporated towns when requested by the leading investigating entity, and to participate in the Loudoun County Fire Investigation Task Force in those cases involving large property losses and/or human fatalities.

## III. ORGANIZATION

- A. The Fire Investigation Task Force consists of staff from each agency listed above. Technical staff for evidence collection and photography will be provided by the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office and the Leesburg Police Department. If an incident occurs in the towns of Purcellville or Middleburg, the Chief of Police or his/her designated representative will be notified immediately of the incident and will lend assistance if their manpower situation permits.
- B. The administration of this task force has been set up under the premise that all incidents investigated by the Fire Investigation Task Force shall be treated as criminal investigations until proven otherwise.
- C. A lead fire investigator will determine whether the task force should be activated. When this activation occurs, the team will operate under the direction of the lead fire investigator until a determination has been made as to the origin and cause of the fire. In the case of a fatal fire determined to be a potential homicide, the chain of authority shall move to the lead criminal investigator from either the Sheriff's Office or the Leesburg Police Department, depending on where the fire incident occurred. The Fire Marshal's Office shall continue to provide investigative assistance. In the case of a fatal fire which has been determined to be accidental, the lead fire investigator shall

remain in charge with the assistance of the Sheriff's Office, Leesburg Police Department, Purcellville Police Department, or Middleburg Police Department, depending upon the jurisdiction of the incident.

#### IV. PROCEDURES

A. The following procedures shall govern the activation of the task force:

1. A fire has resulted in extensive damage or the lead fire investigator feels the expertise of the Fire Investigation Task Force is needed for the investigation.
2. All fires in which there are life threatening injuries or possible or confirmed loss of human life. (This includes any fire regardless of property classification)
3. Post-blast investigation.

#### V. NOTIFICATION

A. Fire-Rescue Emergency Communications Center personnel shall notify:

1. The duty fire investigator
2. Fire Marshal Duty Supervisor
3. The Sheriff's Office Emergency Communications Center ("ECC")
  - a. Sheriff's Office ECC staff will notify the on-call Criminal Investigations Division supervisor and other appropriate Sheriff's Office personnel to respond to the scene.
  - b. Such notifications shall communicate the particulars of the incident.
4. Public Information
  - a. The Public Information Officer ("PIO") from the lead investigating agency shall be responsible for establishing a media post in a highly visible, yet safe position.
  - b. The PIO shall provide Fire and Rescue and the Sheriff's Office ECC, as well as any mass media representatives on the scene, with a preliminary statement of facts as soon as practical.
  - c. The PIO shall prepare and disseminate a final statement of facts for release to the public. All statements should be approved by the lead investigator or supervisor prior to release.

- d. A press release form shall be utilized so that all facts suitable for release are included. Copies of these blank forms will be supplied to both Emergency Communications Centers. In criminal and death investigation cases, the CID supervisor shall approve releases.
- e. Press releases should be coordinated with all assisting agencies' media personnel.
- f. All Press Release forms will be returned to the lead investigator for inclusion in the investigative file.

**VI. SCENE SECURITY**

- A. It is the responsibility of the Duty Fire Marshal to ensure that boundary tape, rope, etc., is properly placed to maintain scene security prior to the arrival of the task force.
  - 1. All non-essential personnel will remain outside the secured area. No one will re-enter the secured premises until authorized by the lead investigator or his/her designee of the task force.
  - 2. Uniformed deputies/officers will assist with scene security, if necessary.