

# East Lake Tarpon Special Fire Control District

	<b><i>SOP 406 Fire Investigations</i></b>	
	<b>Implementation Date: 11/2000</b>	<b>Revision Date(s): 3/22/2018</b>
		<b>Reviewed Date(s): 06/26/2018</b>
	<b>Forms or Attachments: None</b>	

**406.1 PURPOSE:** To establish a guideline for the proper investigation of fires within the East Lake Fire District. The fire department has the responsibility to investigate fires in an attempt to determine the origin and cause.

**406.2 GENERAL POLICY:** It is the responsibility of the incident commander to provide origin and cause investigation for all fire incidents and assure that the proper reports are completed.

A. If the investigation is beyond the scope or expertise of the engine crew, the officer in charge should contact the on-duty division chief to make proper arrangements for the notification of an appropriate fire investigator.

B. Shift personnel that are certified fire inspectors/investigators may be utilized in the investigation. However, in the case of all suspicious fires, fires with large dollar loss, and all fires with injuries/fatalities, the deputy chief or their designee shall be notified immediately and informed of the situation.

C. Engine companies shall delay non-essential overhaul until an investigator has surveyed the area. Salvage activities which stop further property damage should continue if they do not interfere with the area of origin and any possible evidence.

D. When delay in response by an investigator is indicated, the incident commander shall assign personnel to protect the fire scene and maintain custody until the arrival of an investigator. Protection of the fire scene and preservation of physical evidence will be a primary concern once life safety is secured and fire control is achieved.

E. If the situation is of a magnitude that East Lake personnel cannot physically examine the scene, a fire investigator(s) from a neighboring department should be requested through dispatch. In addition, other available resources including the Pinellas County Fire Investigation Task

Force, the Pinellas Sheriff's Office, and the State Fire Marshal's Office may be utilized for assistance. Requests should be made through dispatch.

F. Interviews with the press, regarding cause, origin or the investigation, should be made by the Fire Marshal, Public Information Officer or their designee only after consultation with on-scene investigators, State Fire Marshals, deputies, law enforcement officers, medical examiner, the incident commander, and others involved in the investigation.

#### **406.3 NON-SUSPICIOUS/ACCIDENTAL FIRES:**

A. If the investigator determines that the fire's origin and cause is accidental, then the appropriate fire investigation forms shall be completed and attached to the Florida State Fire Incident Report form. All fires shall have the appropriate field report filled out and attached to the back of the Florida Fire Incident Report form.

B. If there is a large dollar loss or a fire with injuries, whether accidental or suspicious, there should be photographs taken of the fire scene. The Pinellas County Sheriff's office or the State Fire Marshal's office may be requested to assist with collecting and photographing evidence.

**406.4 SUSPICIOUS/INCENDIARY FIRES:** If the fire has been determined to be suspicious/incendiary, then the Pinellas County Sheriff's office is to be notified immediately. Depending on the type, size, and dollar loss of the fire, the fire investigator and the PCSO Deputy will determine if an arson detective and/or the State Fire Marshal's office will be dispatched to the scene to assist in the investigation.

#### **406.5 EVIDENCE:**

A. Arrangements should be made for the fire scene to be secured from the time in which the fire is suppressed until the on-scene investigation is complete. No unauthorized persons are to enter the scene, and care must be taken to prevent personnel from unnecessarily walking through the fire area.

B. Evidence shall be collected by either on scene law enforcement personnel or experienced fire investigators. Evidence samples should normally be collected, logged and custody maintained by law enforcement personnel, either the State Fire Marshal's office or Pinellas County Sheriff's office.

C. Scene and evidence documentation shall include notes, diagrams, photos, that

how:

1. Specific location of the item and the scene.
2. Name of investigator who located the material and removed it from scene.
3. Description of the evidence and any unique markings or labels.
4. Date and Time of the item was located and collected.
5. Photos showing the item and location prior to and after collection.

#### **406.7 REPORTS:**

- A. The fire investigator will complete the preliminary report within a 24-hour time period. All copies of floor diagrams, witness interviews, and origin and cause field reports shall be attached to the Florida Fire Incident Report form.
- B. Photos, negatives, video, or digital floppy disk shall also be attached to the report and identified by incident number, giving the time and date along with photographer's name.
- C. Pinellas County Building Department should also be notified of any structural damage, so they can determine if any permits are needed for repair or rebuilding.
- D. Any smoke or fire damage to food establishments should be reported to the following State agencies:
  1. For restaurants and eat-in type deli's contact: State Division of Hotel and Motels.
  2. For takeout delis, bakeries, grocery stores: State Department of Agriculture and Consumer Regulation.