

NFPA 1033  
Standard for  
Professional Qualifications for Fire Investigator  
1998 Edition

Chapter 1. Administration

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1-1 Scope.

This standard identifies the professional level of performance required for fire investigators. It specifically identifies the job performance requirements necessary to perform as a fire investigator.

1-2\* Purpose.

The purpose of this standard is to specify the minimum job performance requirements for service as a fire investigator in both the private and public sectors. It is not the intent of this standard to restrict any jurisdiction from exceeding these minimum requirements. Job performance requirements describe the performance required for a specific job. The complete list of requirements for each duty describes the tasks an individual must be able to perform in order to successfully carry out that duty; however, they are not intended to measure a level of knowledge. Together, the duties and job performance requirements define the parameters of the job of fire investigator.

1-3 General.

1-3.1

The fire investigator shall be at least age 18.

1-3.2

The fire investigator shall have a high school diploma or a state-recognized equivalent.

1-3.3

The authority having jurisdiction shall conduct a thorough background and character investigation prior to accepting an individual as a candidate for certification as a fire investigator.

1-3.4

The job performance requirements for fire investigator shall be completed in accordance with recognized practices and procedures or as they are defined by law or by the authority having jurisdiction.

1-3.5\*

The job performance requirements defined in this standard need not be mastered in the order in which they appear. Training agencies or authorities shall establish programs that prepare individuals to meet the requirements defined in this standard.

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1-3.6

Evaluation of job performance requirements shall be by individuals approved by the authority having jurisdiction. The evaluator shall be qualified to conduct the evaluation of an investigator.

1-3.7\*

The fire investigator shall remain current with investigation methodology, fire protection technology, and current code requirements by attending workshops and seminars and/or through professional publications and journals.

Chapter 2 Definitions

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2-1 Definitions.

Approved.\* Acceptable to the authority having jurisdiction.

Authority Having Jurisdiction.\* The organization, office, or individual responsible for approving equipment, an installation, or a procedure.

Due Process. The compliance with the criminal and civil laws and procedures within the jurisdiction where the incident occurred.

Fire Department. An organization providing rescue, fire suppression, and related activities. For the purposes of this standard, the term "fire department" includes any public, private, or military organization engaging in this type of activity.

Fire Investigator. An individual who has demonstrated the skills and knowledge necessary to conduct, coordinate, and complete an investigation.

Investigation. A systematic inquiry or examination.

Job Performance Requirement. A statement that describes a specific job task, lists the items necessary to complete the task, and defines measurable or observable outcomes and evaluation areas for the specific task.

Labeled. Equipment or materials to which has been attached a label, symbol, or other identifying mark of an organization that is acceptable to the authority having jurisdiction and concerned with product evaluation, that maintains periodic inspection of production of labeled equipment or materials, and by whose labeling the manufacturer indicates compliance with appropriate standards or performance in a specified manner.

Listed.\* Equipment, materials, or services included in a list published by an organization that is acceptable to the authority having jurisdiction and concerned with evaluation of products or services, that maintains periodic inspection of production of listed equipment or materials or periodic evaluation of services, and whose listing states that either the equipment, material, or service meets identified standards or has been tested and found suitable for a specified purpose.

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Requisite Knowledge. Fundamental knowledge one must have in order to perform a specific task.

Requisite Skills. The essential skills one must have in order to perform a specific task.

Shall. Indicates a mandatory requirement.

Should. Indicates a recommendation or that which is advised but not required.

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Special Tools. Tools of a specialized or unique nature that might not be required for every fire investigation, as are the standard equipment and tools. Examples include heavy equipment, hydrocarbon detectors, ignitable liquid detection canine teams, microscopes, flash point testers, and so forth.

Standard Equipment and Tools.\* Standard equipment and tools are a 35-mm camera, flash, and film, a flashlight, a shovel, a broom, hand tools, a tape measure, safety clothing and equipment, and evidence collection containers.

Task. A specific job behavior or activity.

## Chapter 3 Fire Investigator

### 3-1 General.

#### 3-1.1\*

The fire investigator shall meet the job performance requirements defined in Sections 3-2 through 3-7. In addition, the fire investigator shall meet the requirements of 2-2.1 through 2-2.3 of NFPA 472, Standard for Professional Competence of Responders to Hazardous Materials Incidents.

#### 3-1.2

Because fire investigators are required to perform activities in adverse conditions, regional and national safety standards shall be included in organizational policies and procedures.

#### 3-1.3

The fire investigator shall maintain appropriate liaison with other interested professionals.

#### 3-1.4\*

The fire investigator shall ensure that due process of law is served.

### 3-2 Scene Examination.

Duties shall include inspecting and evaluating the scene so as to determine the area or point of origin, source of ignition, material(s) ignited, and act or activity that brought ignition source and materials together and assessing the subsequent progression, extinguishment, and containment of the fire.

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#### 3-2.1

Secure the fire ground, given marking devices, sufficient personnel, and special tools and equipment, so that unauthorized persons can recognize the perimeters of the investigative scene and are kept from restricted areas, and all evidence or potential evidence is protected from damage or destruction.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Fire ground hazards, types of evidence, and the importance of fire scene security, evidence preservation, and issues relating to spoliation.

(b) Requisite Skills: Use of marking devices.

### 3-2.2

Conduct an exterior survey, given standard equipment and tools, so that evidence is preserved, fire damage is interpreted, hazards are identified to avoid injuries, accessibility to the property is determined, and all potential means of ingress and egress are discovered.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Knowledge of the types of building construction and the effects of fire upon construction materials, types of evidence commonly found in the perimeter, evidence preservation methods, the effects of fire suppression, fire behavior and spread, and burn patterns.

(b) Requisite Skills: Assess fire ground and structural condition, observe the damage and effects of the fire, and interpret burn patterns.

### 3-2.3

Conduct an interior survey, given standard equipment and tools, so that areas of potential evidentiary value requiring further examination are identified and preserved, the evidentiary value of contents is determined, and hazards are identified in order to avoid injuries.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Knowledge of the types of building construction and interior finish and the effects of fire upon those materials, the effects of fire suppression, fire behavior and spread, evidence preservation methods, burn patterns, effects of building contents on fire growth, and the relationship of contents to the overall investigation.

(b) Requisite Skills: Assess structural conditions, observe the damage and effects of the fire, discover the impact of fire suppression efforts on fire flow and heat propagation, and evaluate protected areas to determine the presence and/or absence of contents.

### 3-2.4

Interpret burn patterns, given standard equipment and tools and some structural or content remains, so that each individual pattern is evaluated with respect to the burning characteristics of the material involved.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Knowledge of fire development and the interrelationship of heat release rate, form, and ignitability of materials.

(b) Requisite Skills: Interpret the effects of burning characteristics on different types of materials.

### 3-2.5

Correlate burn patterns, given standard equipment and tools and some structural or content remains, so that fire development is determined, methods and effects of suppression are evaluated, false origin area patterns are recognized, and all areas of origin are correctly identified.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Knowledge of fire behavior and spread based on fire chemistry and physics, fire suppression effects, and building construction.

(b) Requisite Skills: Interpret variations of burn patterns on different materials with consideration given to heat release rate, form, and ignitability; distinguish impact of different types of fuel loads; evaluate fuel trails; and analyze and synthesize information.

### 3-2.6

Examine and remove fire debris, given standard equipment and tools, so that all debris is checked for fire cause evidence, the ignition source(s) is identified, the fire cause is determined, and evidence is preserved without investigator-inflicted damage or contamination.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Basic understanding of ignition processes, characteristics of ignition sources, and ease of ignition of fuels, debris-layering techniques, use of tools and equipment during the debris search, types of fire cause evidence commonly found in various degrees of damage, and evidence-gathering methods and documentation.

(b) Requisite Skills: Employ search techniques that further the discovery of fire cause evidence and ignition sources, use search techniques that incorporate documentation, and collect and preserve evidence.

### 3-2.7

Reconstruct the area of origin, given standard and, if needed, special equipment and tools as well as sufficient personnel, so that all protected areas and burn patterns are identified and correlated to contents or structural remains, items potentially critical to cause determination and photo documentation are returned to their prefire location, and the point(s) of origin is discovered.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Knowledge of the effects of fire on different types of material and the importance and uses of reconstruction.

(b) Requisite Skills: Examine all materials to determine the effects of fire, identify and distinguish among different types of fire-damaged contents, and return materials to their original position using protected areas and burn patterns.

### 3-2.8\*

Inspect the performance of building systems, including detection, suppression, HVAC, utilities, and building compartmentation, given standard and special equipment and tools, so that a determination can be made as to the need for expert resources, an operating systems impact on fire growth and spread is considered in identifying origin areas, and defeated systems are identified.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Different types of detection, suppression, HVAC, utility, and building compartmentation such as fire walls and fire doors, types of

expert resources for building systems, the impact of fire on various systems, and common methods used to defeat a system's functional capability.

(b) Requisite Skills: Determine the systems operation and its effect on the fire, identify alterations to building systems, and evaluate the impact of suppression efforts on building systems.

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3-2.9

Discriminate the effects of explosions from other types of damage, given standard equipment and tools, so that an explosion is identified and its evidence is preserved.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Different types of explosions and their causes, characteristics of an explosion, and the difference between low- and high-order explosions.

(b) Requisite Skills: Identify explosive effects on glass, walls, foundations, and other building materials, distinguish between low- and high-order explosion effects, and analyze damage to document the blast zone and origin.

3-3 Documenting the Scene.

Duties shall include diagramming the scene, photographing, and taking field notes to be used to compile a final report.

3-3.1

Diagram the scene, given standard tools and equipment, so that the scene is accurately represented and evidence, pertinent contents, significant patterns, and origin areas or points are identified.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Commonly used symbols and legends that clarify the diagram, types of evidence and patterns that need to be documented, and formats for diagramming the scene.

(b) Requisite Skills: Ability to sketch the scene, basic drafting skills, and evidence recognition and observational skills.

3-3.2\*

Photographically document the scene, given standard tools and equipment, so that the scene is accurately depicted and the photographs appropriately support scene findings.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Working knowledge of a 35-mm camera and flash, types of 35-mm cameras, and types of film and flash available, as well as the strengths and limitations of each.

(b) Requisite Skills: Ability to use a 35-mm camera and flash.

3-3.3

Construct investigative notes, given a fire scene, available documents (e.g., prefire plans and inspection reports), and interview information, so that the notes are accurate, provide further documentation of the scene, and represent complete documentation of the scene findings.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Relationship between notes, diagrams, and photos, how to reduce scene information into concise notes, and the use of notes during report writing and legal proceedings.

(b) Requisite Skills: Data-reduction skills, note-taking skills, and observational and correlating skills.

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#### 3-4 Evidence Collection/Preservation.

Duties shall include using proper physical and legal procedures to retain evidence required within the investigation.

##### 3-4.1

Utilize proper procedures for managing victims and fatalities, given a protocol and appropriate personnel, so that all evidence is discovered and preserved and the protocol procedures are followed.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Types of evidence associated with fire victims and fatalities and evidence preservation methods.

(b) Requisite Skills: Observational skills and the ability to apply protocols to given situations.

##### 3-4.2

Locate, collect, and package evidence, given standard or special tools and equipment and evidence collection materials, so that evidence is identified, preserved, collected, and packaged to avoid contamination and investigator-inflicted damage, and the chain of custody is established.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Types of evidence (exclusionary or fire-cause supportive evidence), types, capabilities, and limitations of standard and special tools used to locate evidence, types of laboratory tests available, packaging techniques and materials, and impact of evidence collection on the investigation.

(b) Requisite Skills: Ability to recognize different types of evidence and determine evidence critical to the investigation.

##### 3-4.3

Select appropriate evidence for analysis, given information from the investigative file, so that samples forwarded for analysis support specific investigative needs.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Purposes for submitting samples, types of analytical services available, and capabilities and limitations of the services performing the analysis.

(b) Requisite Skills: Evaluate the fire incident to determine forensic, engineering, or laboratory needs.

##### 3-4.4

Maintain a chain of custody, given standard investigative tools, marking tools, and evidence tags or logs, so that written documentation exists for each piece of evidence and evidence is secured.

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(a) Requisite Knowledge: Rules of custody and transfer procedures, types of evidence (e.g., physical evidence obtained at the scene, photos, and documents), and methods of recording the chain of custody.

(b) Requisite Skills: Ability to execute the chain of custody procedures and accurately complete necessary documents.

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3-4.5

Dispose of evidence, given jurisdictional or agency regulations and file information, so that the disposal is timely, safely conducted, and in compliance with jurisdictional or agency requirements.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Disposal services available and common disposal procedures and problems.

(b) Requisite Skills: Documentation skills.

3-5 Interview/Interrogation.

Duties shall include obtaining information regarding the overall fire investigation from others through verbal communication.

3-5.1

Develop an interview plan, given no special tools or equipment, so that the plan reflects a strategy to further determine the fire cause and affix responsibility and includes a relevant questioning strategy for each individual to be interviewed that promotes the efficient use of the investigator's time.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Persons who can provide information that furthers the fire cause determination or the affixing of responsibility, types of questions that are pertinent and efficient to ask of different information sources (fire department, neighbors, witnesses, suspects, and so forth), and pros and cons of interviews versus document gathering.

(b) Requisite Skills: Planning skills, development of focused questions for specific individuals, and evaluation of existing file data to help develop questions and fill investigative gaps.

3-5.2

Conduct interviews or interrogations, given incident information, so that pertinent information is obtained, follow-up questions are asked, responses to all questions are elicited, and the response to each question is documented accurately.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Knowledge of types of interviews, personal information needed for proper documentation or follow-up, documenting methods and tools, and types of nonverbal communications and their meaning.

(b) Requisite Skills: Adjust interviewing strategies based on deductive reasoning, interpret verbal and nonverbal communications, apply applicable legal requirements, and exhibit strong listening skills.

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3-5.3

Evaluate interview information, given interview transcripts or notes and incident data, so that all interview data is individually analyzed and correlated with all

other interviews, corroborative and conflictive information is documented, and new leads are discovered.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Types of interviews, report evaluation methods, and data correlating methods.

(b) Requisite Skills: Data correlating skills and the ability to evaluate source information (e.g., fire department and witness).

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### 3-6 Post-Incident Investigation.

Duties shall include the investigation of all factors beyond the fire scene at the tie of the origin and cause determination.

#### 3-6.1

Gather reports and records, given no special tools, equipment, or materials, so that all gathered documents are appropriate to the investigation, complete, and authentic, the chain of custody is maintained, and the material is acceptable to the courts.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Types of reports needed that facilitate determining responsibility for the fire (e.g., police reports, fire reports, insurance policies, financial records, deeds, private investigator reports, outside photos, and videos) and location of these reports.

(b) Requisite Skills: Identify the proper reports and documents necessary for the investigation, implementing the chain of custody, and organizational skills.

#### 3-6.2

Evaluate the investigative file, given all available file information, so that areas for further investigation are identified, the relationship between gathered documents and information is interpreted, and corroborative evidence and information discrepancies are discovered.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: File assessment and/or evaluation methods, proper and acceptable documentation, and proper contents of investigative findings and gathered documentation.

(b) Requisite Skills: Information assessment and correlation skills and organizational skills.

#### 3-6.3

Coordinate expert resources, given the investigative file, reports, and documents, so that the expert's competencies are matched to the specific investigation needs, financial expenditures are justified, and utilization clearly furthers the investigation toward the goals of causation determination or affixing responsibility.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Knowledge of the investigator's own expertise, qualifications needed for expert testimony, types of expert resources (e.g., forensic, CPA, polygraph, financial, human behavioral disorders, and engineering), and methods to identify expert resources.

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(b) Requisite Skills: Recognize the value of expert resources to further the investigation, network with other investigators to identify experts, question experts relative to their qualifications, and plan utilization of expert resources.

#### 3-6.4

Establish evidence as to motive and/or opportunity, given an incendiary fire, so that the evidence is the result of a prudent and complete investigation, is supported by documentation, and meets the evidentiary requirements of the jurisdiction.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Types of motives common to incendiary fire investigation, methods used to discover opportunity, and understanding human behavioral patterns relative to fire setting.

(b) Requisite Skills: Financial analysis, records gathering and analysis, interviewing, and interpreting fire scene information and evidence for relationship to motive and/or opportunity.

#### 3-6.5

Formulate an opinion of the person(s) and/or product(s) responsible for the fire, given all investigative findings, so that the opinion regarding responsibility for a fire is supported by all records, reports, documents, and evidence.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Analytical methods and procedures (e.g., hypothesis testing, systems analysis, time lines, link analysis, fault tree analysis, and data reduction matrixing).

(b) Requisite Skills: Analytical and assimilation skills.

#### 3-7 Presentations.

Duties shall include the ability to present findings to those individuals not involved in the actual investigation.

#### 3-7.1

Prepare a written investigation report, given investigative findings, documentation, and a specific audience, so that the report accurately reflects the investigative findings, is concise, expresses the investigator's opinion, and is appropriate for the intended audience(s).

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Elements of writing, typical components of a written report, and types of audiences and their respective needs.

(b) Requisite Skills: Writing skills, ability to analyze information, and ability to determine the reader's needs.

#### 3-7.2

Express investigative findings verbally, given investigative findings, notes, a time allotment, and a specific audience, so that the information is accurate, the presentation is completed within the allotted time, and the presentation includes only need-to-know information for the intended audience.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Types of investigative findings, the informational needs of various types of audiences, and the impact of releasing information.

(b) Requisite Skills: Communication skills, ability to determine audience needs, and ability to correlate findings.

### 3-7.3

Testify during legal proceedings, given investigative findings, contents of reports, and consultation with legal counsel, so that all pertinent investigative information and evidence is presented clearly and accurately, and the investigator's demeanor and attire are appropriate to the proceedings.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Types of investigative findings, understanding of the types of legal proceedings, appropriate demeanor for each, and an understanding of legal proceedings.

(b) Requisite Skills: Communication and listening skills, ability to differentiate facts from opinions, and ability to determine appropriate procedures, practices, and etiquette during legal proceedings.

### 3-7.4

Conduct public informational presentations, given relative data, so that information is accurate, appropriate to the audience, and clearly supports the information needs of the audience.

(a) Requisite Knowledge: Types of data available regarding the fire loss problem and the issues about which the community must know.

(b) Requisite Skills: Ability to assemble, organize, and present information.

### Chapter 4 Referenced Publications

#### 4-1

The following documents or portions thereof are referenced within this standard as mandatory requirements and shall be considered part of the requirements of this standard. The edition indicated for each referenced mandatory document is the current edition as of the date of the NFPA issuance of this standard. Some of these mandatory documents might also be referenced in this standard for specific informational purposes and, therefore, are also listed in Appendix B.

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