



Orono Fire Department Standard Operating Procedure

O-500 Fire Cause Determination

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Pages: 2

Approved by: Geoffrey Low, Fire Chief

Purpose

To establish guidelines for the initial investigation of fires and similar incidents.

Procedure

Shift Officer Requirements

Maine statute requires that all fires be investigated for their cause and origin by the Fire Chief or their designee. Routinely, the Shift Officer in charge is responsible for determining the cause and origin of fires that occur in Orono.

If the Shift Officer is unable to make a cause and origin determination or they are unsure of their findings, they must request assistance from an Orono investigator or chief officer.

When conducting an initial investigation, the Shift Officer shall perform the following:

- Upon arrival, note the size and location of the fire, the amount and color of smoke, what is burning, and how the fire reacted to suppression efforts.
- Modify or delay overhaul and clean-up operations as necessary to preserve evidence.
- Secure the premises from unauthorized and unnecessary entry.
- Determine that the structure is safe for entry.
- Survey the exterior and interior, noting and protecting possible evidence and probable area(s) of origin.
- Find the owner/occupants for an account of how the fire started.
- Note who discovered the fire and obtain a description of their observations.
- Note any witnesses at the scene for their observations
- All witnesses must have their names and contact information in the officer's report.
- Once back at the station, all initial responding firefighters must complete the first-in reports.
- Complete the MEFIRS report as possible before leaving the station.

Orono Investigator Notification

The Life Safety Inspector or, in the absence of a Life Safety Inspector, a chief officer will be notified of any fire in Orono. If the investigator is not needed at the scene, this notification may be made by e-mail within eight hours of the initial call for service.

If an investigator is needed at the scene, the first call will be made to the Life Safety Inspector and then to the second inspector if there is no answer.

An Orono investigator will be requested anytime:

- There is an injury or fatality
- The Shift Officer is unable to determine the origin or cause
- The fire appears to be suspicious
- The Shift Officer feels the situation warrants an investigator to respond

State Fire Marshal Notification

The Shift Officer will notify the State Fire Marshals Office in the following situations:

- Any fire that results in a fatality
- Any fire that results in an injury
- Any fireworks-related fire, injury, or fatality
- Any injury, death, or accident involving an amusement ride
- Any fire that causes a significant dollar loss (greater than \$500,000)

Any other notifications will be at the discretion of the Investigator or Chief Officer.

Securing the Scene and Evidence Preservation

A fire scene may be held for a reasonable amount of time following suppression efforts to permit an investigation. If the decision to hold a scene is made, the following must occur:

1. The owner/occupant will be notified the fire department is retaining control of the building until the investigation is complete.
2. Scene tape indicating that entry is prohibited must be placed across openings that people would likely use to enter the structure or area.
3. A fire department member will be assigned to maintain the security of the building or area.
4. A log will be maintained to:
 - a. Record who enters and exits the secure area, including the times of each.
 - b. Any unexpected occurrences. For example, unauthorized entrants into the secured area.
5. The scene will only be released at the direction of an Orono investigator, chief officer, or the State Fire Marshal.

Every effort should be made to preserve and secure evidence. If evidence must be moved to permit fire suppression or avoid spoliation or destruction, its location must be recorded at a minimum. Ideally, the evidence should be photographed from multiple angles before being moved. Moved evidence should be noted in the Shift Officer report.