

FIREPOINT



IAAI JOURNAL



Firepoint

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EDITORIAL

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Vol. 11, No. 3, September, 2000

The New South Wales, Queensland and Victorian Chapters are all now Associations of Fire Investigators. A sensible decision. An acknowledgement that fires can be natural (e.g lightning), accidental or deliberate. Usually we can not tell the cause until after a thorough investigation. Arson is only one area of fire investigation.

In this issue thee are two examples given of firefighters in the U.S. lighting fires. We also feature an Australian article proposing how such incidents might be avoided.

There is a local article by Drew Lindsay giving some sensible tips for interviewing. It's good to get local articles. Have you considered putting in a contribution?

Wal Stern



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QUEENSLAND NEWS

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

This year has been extremely eventful for the QAFI with the "House Warming Workshop" at Moggill followed by the "Fire Dynamics Workshop" conducted by Dr. John DeHaan. Both of these workshops were extremely successful and on behalf of the QAFI Committee, I would like to sincerely thank the following organisations for their support.

- Boral Ltd
- B & B Screens
- Brisbane City Council
- Brooks Australia Fire & Warning Systems
- Dept. of Mines & Energy – Electrical Safety Office
- Dunhill Madden Butler (Lawyers)
- Dr. John DeHaan
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Forensic Services Australia
- Freemans Australia (Loss Adjusters)
- Mullins Builders
- National Institute of Forensic Sciences (NIFS)
- Pacific Adjusters
- QFRA – Fire Investigation Research Unit
- QFRA – Live Fire Training Unit
- QFRA – Instructors & Probationary Fire Officers
- Queensland Police Service – Scientific & Arson
- Sanyo Australia

I would also like to thank the committee for their commitment to the projects and our members for attending the workshops.

NEW MEMBERS

The QAFI Committee would like to welcome the following new members:-

- **Ray O'Sullivan**, Freemans Australia
- **Peter Leeson**, Dept. of Natural Resources
- **Emma Riley**, Qld Police Service
- **Robert Campbell**, Qld Police Service
- **Kate Hitchens**, Kennedy's Loss Adjusters

MEMBERS SURVEY

Over the past 10 years, your association has held various training/educational activities.

To assist with the planning of future activities, all members have been sent a "Members Survey". It would be appreciated if members could take a few minutes to complete the survey and return them to Julianne Foley, QAFI Administration

Officer, PO Box 5173, Alexandra Hills Q 4161 as soon as possible.

Remember, this is your Association, have your say on the future direction it will take in relation to training.

QLD CHAPTER TO CELEBRATE 10TH ANNIVERSARY

A special luncheon has been organised for Friday 15th September to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Queensland Association of Fire Investigators Inc. (IAAI Chapter No. 59).

This is an opportunity to celebrate our achievements and to honor our past Presidents, long serving members and sponsors.

Our special guest speaker for this event will be Professor Paul Wilson, Australia's best known criminologist and author of 35 books and over 100 articles on a variety of forensic and criminal justice issues.

Professor Wilson's address will be looking at the useful profiling techniques in arson investigations.

The luncheon is being held from 12 Noon to 2.00pm at The Stamford Plaza Hotel (previously known as The Heritage Hotel), Brisbane.

Your invitations to this celebration have been sent. We look forward to seeing you at this special event.

All enquiries for this function should be directed to Julianne Foley on (07) 3822 4700.

FIRE DYNAMICS WORKSHOP - CERTIFICATES -

The QAFI have received many calls in relation to the "Certificates" for those that attended the "Fire Dynamics Workshop" conducted by Dr. John DeHaan in March.

This was a joint workshop hosted by The National Institute of Forensic Science (NIFS) and The QAFI. All certificates are being issued by NIFS. I have been advised that delegates will receive either a "Certificate of Attendance" or "Certificate of Attendance & Successful Completion of Assessment" this month.

On behalf of the QAFI Committee and NIFS, I wish to sincerely apologise for the delay that has occurred in issuing these certificates.

A Message from the President of the IAAI

July 2000

From my viewpoint the most important thing that we can and should be doing as a professional organization is to provide our members with the opportunity to enhance their professional development. I believe that this is not a destination; rather it is a journey. Every one of us should consider the concept of lifetime learning as the model we should embrace with respect to our own professional development. Each member should dedicate themselves to doing at least one thing this year to achieve personal professional improvement.

On the training front Bill Buxton and the T&E committee are busy on a number of projects. Perhaps the most important from my perspective is the work being done to expand the delivery of the Expert Witness Courtroom Testimony course. The IAAI and the National Fire Academy are cooperating to deliver three (3) simultaneous facilitator courses at the NFA in Emmittsburg, MD in January of 2001. This will involve a one-day review of material and facilitator preparation followed by the full three-day course including a full day of courtroom testimony. The end result will be 24 additional members being able to deliver the course on request in the field.

I am extremely pleased to announce that we have signed an agreement with Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company to have Alan Clark of Iowa serve as our interim Executive Director. This professional services contract is for a period of one year while we continue our executive search. Even though

Alan has only been on board for a short period of time he is already hard at work for the association. Alan was also able to secure \$3,000 to cover the cost of distribution of the forthcoming CD-ROM membership directory from Grinnell Mutual.

Currently, Alan and the office staff are looking at banking issues and our computer system to see where we can institute cost saving measures or take steps to enhance our revenue stream. I am confident that with Alan we have made an extremely wise choice and believe he will prove to be a great benefit to our association.

During my first two months in office I have already made three trips to Washington, DC to represent the IAAI. The latest of these trips was to attend an event hosted by the Consumer Product Safety Commission on fireworks. During this event I had the opportunity to meet with and speak with Ann Brown, the Chairman of the CPSC. Mrs. Brown expressed her thanks to me for the outstanding working relationship between the CPSC and the IAAI. She is keenly aware of the partnership we have forged and the work that we do together on issues of common interest. My pledge to you is to do everything in my power to assure that this relationship continues for the mutual benefit of the CPSC and the IAAI.

In the very near future you will be seeing a change in our web page. We have agreed in principle to accept an offer from Firehouse.com to handle our web page. In addition to doing

the updates and providing a fresh new look, we will also be given multiple updates every day on news events related to the fire investigation community. A formal announcement is scheduled during the upcoming Firehouse Expo in Baltimore, MD on Friday July 21 2000. Additional details will be provided in next month's President's Perspective.

There is a great deal of progress being made by the Certified Fire Investigator committee to meet the goals and objectives set for that committee. Chairman Kirk Hankins of Missouri and his committee are working with the five chapters in Canada to resolve the remaining issues to enable our Canadian members to begin full participation in the CFI program. They are also working with the Israel chapter to bring the CFI program there. One hang up is the translation of NFPA 921 into Hebrew. This is an item that the IAAI is working with the NFPA to address. Our liaison to the NFPA, Steve Austin, is awaiting word from the NFPA on how we can accomplish this mission critical step. But perhaps the biggest news is that we are in discussion with representatives in the Republic of Georgia (in the former Soviet Union) and members from South Africa to establish chapters and the CFI program in those locations. What a monumental step for the IAAI as the world's leading professional organization in the fire investigation community!

Gerard J Naylis
President

VICTORIAN NEWS

NAME CHANGE FOR VICTORIA CHAPTER 58

At the AGM held on the 14th July 2000 the members present voted to accept the recommendation for the Chapter Committee and motion that the Chapter now be known as:

"VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION OF FIRE INVESTIGATORS (VAFI)"

PRESIDENTS REPORT

Presented by Alex Conway

Last year has been a productive year for the Victorian Chapter. I must thank the committee for their efforts for the past year. It is getting harder year by year for the committee to balance work, home and still be able to devote time to the Victorian Chapter.

Committee for 1999/2000

President: Alex Conway
V/President: Brian Neal
Treasurer:
Adrian Edwards

Secretary: Terry McCabe
Committee:
Scott Staunton
(Legal Officer)
Bob Hetherington
(Registrar)
Trevor Pillinger
(Education Officer)
Tony Mandaranno
Noel Desair
John Kelleher
Nicole Harvey
Peter Endler
Peter Seiz

Leaving the committee this year was Colin Cortous and Colin Brown and thanks to them for their contribution to the Victorian Chapter. There were eight formal Committee meeting held during the year.

Membership numbers have remained stable with, 113 financial members for 1999/2000 and to date, 48 financial members' 2000/2001.

Training Days

While the Chapter did not present many training days in the last year the committee has been preparing for the current training series and the Tasmanian Seminar in November.

In the last year we have had:

September: USA Tour report by Greg Williams & Neal Leb

December: Wildfire Investigation by Neil Barnes

Special thanks to:

The Metropolitan Fire Emergency Service Board for their continuing support through the Fire Investigation & Analysis Unit and for the use of their training complex at Abbotsford.

The Country Fire Authority – Fire Investigation Section and the State Forensic Centre for their continuing support.

Vice President Brian Neal for his assistance and for his many years as our "FirePoint" representative.

In closing, I would like to thank the membership for your support over the last year and for your commitment for the next year.

AGM REPORT

The Annual General meeting was held at the MFESB Training College on Friday 14th July 2000.

Reports from the president and treasurer were received. Committee elections were held for Vice president, Secretary and four Committee members.

Chapter Committee for 2000/2001 as elected:

President: Alex Conway
MFESB
Vice President: Brian Neal
CFA
Secretary: Trevor Pillinger
Fire Investigator
Treasurer: Adrian Edwards
Fire Investigator
Committee: Noel DeSair
Insurance
Committee: Scott Stauton
Legal
Committee
Bob Hetherington MFESB
Nicole Harvey CFA
John Kelleher
Fire Scientist
Tony Mandarano Insurance
Vacant
Vacant

The Committee will be canvassing membership to fill these vacant positions.

Renaming of the Chapter was discussed and passed to be changed to VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION OF FIRE INVESTIGATORS (including Tasmania) INC.

All documentation and banking to be changed.

Other general business was a discussion on GST. The Chapter at this stage will be absorbing all costs

and will not be applying for an ABN Number.

Training Sessions

"Investigation Process of a House Fire"

This was broken into four parts to allow membership to follow the process and the persons involved in a fire scene and what should and what does happen. The first two sessions have been run and received a good reception.

Friday 14th July 2000

The group were taken through the Fire Scene, meeting the Fire Crews, Police, Fire Service Investigator, Forensic Investigator and the Loss Adjuster. There was a lot of interaction created between members of the committee playing the roles and the audience. The manipulation of the video and scene photos enhanced the presentation.

Friday 11th August 2000

Processing and progressing the information. Police & Fire Reports and information were presented. Computer modelling of the fire was discussed and the results. The Owners Problems and his Insurance Claim completed the documentation.

The third session was to be a burn scenario, but the chapter had to cancel due to the numbers attending the first two sessions and the cost.

The last session is to be run on Friday 20th October 2000 being Courtroom procedures. Practical mock court case with all parties represented and cross-examined. All members are encouraged to come along.

TASMANIAN SEMINAR

Thursday 23 and Friday 24th November 2000

Tasmanian Seminar including 2 car burns, 3 cold burns and 3 burns. Case Histories and investigation overviews. This will also include a Seminar Dinner. There will be a limit of 60 attendees. Final arrangements are still being finalised at the date of writing. Check with your local Chapter.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership fees were due 1st July. A review of the membership list will be undertaken as at the 30th September and all unfinancial members will be withdrawn. If you have any enquires they can be directed to the registrar Bob Hetherington on 9420 3883.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ARSON INVESTIGATORS

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

TO THE SECRETARY, _____ CHAPTER _____

ADDRESS _____

STATE _____ POST CODE _____

(Refer to the list of State office bearers on page 3 for the appropriate address).

I hereby apply for membership of the _____ Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators Inc. in accordance with its constitution and By-laws and agree to be bound thereby. I attach the sum of A\$ _____ in payment of Annual Dues (\$ _____) and Initiation Fee (\$ _____).

All information recorded in this application is hereby warranted to be true and correct.

1. NAME IN FULL _____ 2. DATE OF BIRTH _____

3. EMPLOYER _____ 4. POSITION _____

5. BUSINESS ADDRESS _____

CITY/SUBURB _____ STATE _____ POST CODE _____

6. HOME ADDRESS _____

CITY/SUBURB _____ STATE _____ POST CODE _____

7. PHONE (BUS) () _____ FAX () _____

MOBILE () _____ HOME () _____

8. PLEASE LIST ANY FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS (DEGREES, DIPLOMAS, CERTIFICATES etc. WITH THE NAME OF THE ISSUING AUTHORITY AND THE YEAR OF QUALIFICATION.

9. MEMBERSHIP of OTHER ORGANISATIONS _____

10. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CONVICTED of a CRIME? YES _____ NO _____

11. FULL CONVICTION DETAILS _____

12. ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION of the IAAI?

MEMBERSHIP No. _____

13. REFERENCES (Name, address, phone number, occupation)

A _____

B _____

14. RECOMMENDED by a MEMBER in GOOD STANDING

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

15. APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

Fire Investigation Workshop Gold Coast Queensland

Friday 3rd March – Sunday 6th March 2000

Richard Woods
Deputy Fire Control Officer
Shoalhaven District

Background

The Queensland Association of Fire Investigators along with the Queensland Fire & Rescue Authority were joint sponsors of a Fire Investigation Workshop held in Queensland on the Gold Coast on Friday the 3rd March through to Sunday the 5th March. The format for the course was:

On Friday 4th March a Practical fire investigation demonstration was held in the field based on a deliberately lit structural fires in an 80 y.o. timber/fibro 'Queenslander' style house at Mogul on the outskirts of Brisbane. Saturday the 5th March and Sunday the 6th March saw the guest speaker for the Workshop, Mr John DeHaan, a world recognised expert in the Fire Investigation field provide a presentation on fire investigation issues.

The Seminar attracted some 200 participants from a range of backgrounds in the Fire Investigation field. Among those attending were:

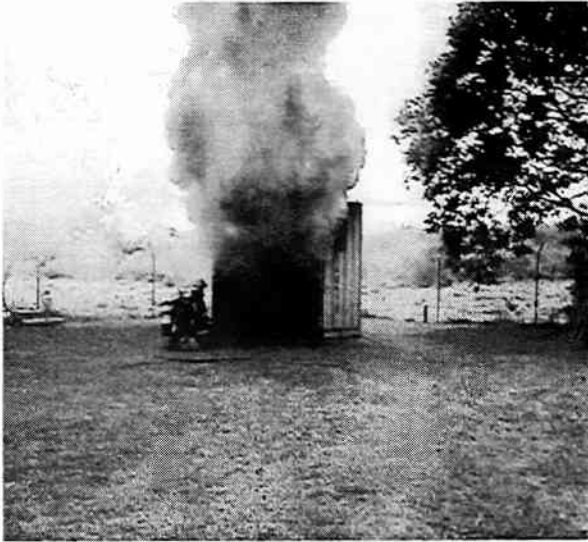
- Country Fire Authority Fire Investigation Co-ordinator.
- Melbourne Fire Brigade Fire Investigation Officers.
- Country Fire Service Fire Investigation Officer
- Fire Investigation Officer from the Western Australian Fires Board

- Fire Investigators and Fire Officers from the Queensland Fire & Rescue Authority
- Scientific Officers from Queensland, NSW, Tasmania, Victoria & Australian Federal Police Services
- Forensic Services Officer from Hong Kong Police Service
- Fire scene examiner from Christchurch, New Zealand
- Forensic Officer from the Fiji Police Service
- A number of representatives from insurance companies.

Day 1

This was a practical demonstration involving some 150 Officers who attended an address in Mogul Queensland where a typical timber 'Queenslander' style house was set up for investigators to examine.

Two exercises were established, one involved a simulated flashback exercise whereby the Queensland Fire & Rescue Authority had established a container set up to simulate flashback. The container had three doors and an internal door set to the front of the container. The fire was set in the container involving pallets and allowed to build and then the container was sealed using the modified internal doors. A demonstration involving a fire crew opening the access door demonstrated clearly the flashback situation encountered at structural fires.



The afternoon session of the practical Workshop involved the deliberate burning of the structure whereby a fire was set in a lower room of the 'Queenslander' house involving newspapers in a sulo bin in that room. The sequence was videotaped and clearly demonstrated the time it takes for a dwelling to become fully involved in fire from ignition. It then allowed examiners to see first hand the way a fire behaves in a confined structure and the time sequence involved in a fire being visible from outside the premises, typically when a call to the emergency services is made. A number of photographs of this sequence were taken.

The practical demonstration then turned to the 'Queenslander' house where two identical rooms had been furnished inside the property and had been subject to fire the day before. One room contained accelerant and a number of ignition points, the other was set with one ignition point and both were allowed to reach a significant stage of involvement and then extinguished. The task of the Workshop was then to allow each group to examine the rooms and determine on a group basis a number of issues involving fire scene examination, particularly –

- The point of origin
- Which room involved accelerant and its location
- Which room flashed over
- An estimation of the time of burning
- The direction of fire travelled in each room & other evidence in relation to fire investigation.

Both rooms were had temperature sensors involved and results of these were also given to investigating parties. At the conclusion of this Workshop crews then re-inspected the rooms involved with the fire setters and the results of their investigations discussed with the organising fire investigators.





Day 2

Dr John DeHaan the guest speaker from California in the United States spoke on a number of issues relating to fire scene investigation.

Fire Dynamics

The issues raised were:

- How do fire spread

- What the effects of convection columns have within a confined structure. Typically the temperatures reached within a structure were discussed in reference to NFPA921 and temperatures involving different substances as they burn.
- Flame height in relation to the heat release rate in a structure was highlighted as being an important issue.
- *Pyrolysis versus combustion*
- *Radiation*
- *Flashover*
- *Post flashover fire*
- *Accelerated fires* – examples were provided of fires where accelerant had been detected and the methods of detecting accelerant within a structure. It was highlighted that the vapour of accelerant burns and very often remnants of the accelerant can be found in the material it was applied to.
- *Fuel load* – the issue of the amount of fuel available to a fire in a structure was discussed and it was highlighted that the amount of fuel in a structure will directly effect the heat release rates within the structure.
- *Cigarettes as a point of ignition*
- *Fuel types* – the behaviour of synthetic materials in a structure fire will see them melt whereas natural materials will tend to char more readily.
- *Fuel state* – the state of the fuel determines how easily ignitable it is and also effects the burn rate and combustion rate of the product.
- *The fire behaviour as an issue* – in a structure fire behaviour and spread is determined by the height of the plume, location of the fuel package, (under a shelf/in a corner etc) against a combustible wall or near drapes will effect how quickly the fire will spread.
- *Fuel distribution* – discussed in relation to the travel of flame as to the proximity of the fuel within a structure.

- **Ventilation** – The size of the opening directly effects the post flashover fire.
- **Time** – accelerant merely shortens the time frame to a flashover fire. Five to six minutes is the average time for a bedroom to be fully involved in flashover and it was highlighted that 40 years ago with the increase use of natural fibres the opportunity for flashover fires to break out quickly was delayed.
- **The effects of fire on physical evidence** – the indicators present in a structural fire should be observed, measured, documented and sized up giving the direction of fire spread, location of packages of fuel and indications of the duration and intensity of the fire in different locations.
- **Enhancement versus protection** – it was highlighted that the protection of material by liquid accelerant can occur. This can be particularly noticed in carpet where accelerant is used.
- **Melting** – scientific tests were provided as examples of temperatures reached during structural fires.
- **Spalling** –Dr DeHaan noted that spalling is not always an indicator of flammable liquid use.
- **Depth of char** – is directly dependant on length of burn and the ventilation opportunities and the intensity of exposure.
- **Glass** – a number of lab tests carried out by Dr DeHaan had proven that fracture lines in glass did not always indicate high temperatures

Day 3

- Dr DeHaan detailed the behaviour of materials when exposed to fire in providing an example of a deliberate fire set in a laboratory involving plastic milk crates. This issue had been raised by a fire department in the United States where they were concerned about a number of deliberately lit fires

involving milk crates at the rear of premises where the fire department were under the impression that an accelerant was used. The example provided in the lab test proved that some 25 to 30 minutes after the ignition of the milk crates only a minor fire had resulted, however, the plastics had melted and within 5 to 6 minutes thereon, the liquid fire became an intense fire which then burnt for a further 20 minutes.

Fatal fires

Dr DeHaan has carried out numerous studies in relation to the deaths of people in fires involving property. He stated that the following kill people;

- Heat
- Hot gasses
- Smoke
- Carbon monoxide
- Anoxia
- Flames
- Blunt objects (persons running into objects when attempting to flee from fire)
- Trauma

He highlighted that firefighters should treat all injury fires as fatal fires as death can often result many days after the victim is burnt. In studies carried out the core temperature of a person will become fatal if it exceeds 43 degrees Celsius after prolonged exposure to high temperatures. The evaporative cooling system of the human body will provide protection up to this point.

Inhalation of hot gasses – this results in the swelling and inflammation of tissues inhibiting air intake. Steam inhalation can also result in severe burns.

Smoke/soot – heat particles that lodge in the air and are inhaled into air passages often contain toxic chemicals. These can

be ingested, inhaled and can obscure vision and result in loss of co-ordination.

Anoxia (lack of oxygen) – Dr DeHaan pointed out that 15 to 10% oxygen levels in a fire scene will result in disorientation, however, less than 10% will lead to unconsciousness and death. It is also directly aggravated by carbon dioxide levels.

Flames – incineration of the skin resulting from radiant heat and consequent blistering and desiccation (contracting of muscles) can result in death.

Blunt Trauma – resulting directly from falls, slips or collapse of structure in a property fire situation.

Vapour density – Dr DeHaan pointed out that if the vapour lies low in a structure the source of ignition must also be low.

Special cases – de-construction of human bodies involved in fire. Dr DeHaan has specialised in the review of cases involving fire damaged bodies. Often these are attributed to spontaneous human combustion. He provided a number of examples that he had investigated involving deceased persons who had been found almost totally consumed by fire with surrounding fuels being unaffected. He found in many cases there was often an incomplete investigation of the death lacking either full medical examination of the remains or toxicology tests being carried out. In his investigations he has determined that the use of a small amount of accelerant on the body to start the fire had contributed to the total destruction of the remains. Time frame studies during his work had indicated that periods of time of approximately 5 hours had been involved in the time frame. His studies included the heat release rate involved invisible flames from a human body with localised temperatures in excess of 500 to 600 degrees celcius resulting in the destruction

of bodyfat, tissue and cartilage and even bone.

Conclusion

I found the seminar most worthwhile particularly as Dr DeHaan provided direct evidence of tests carried out to support theories raised during the forum over the weekend.

Arbitration and Mediation.

Over the past decade there has been an increasing trend, in Australia and overseas, away from traditional litigation as a means of determining disputes. This has been prompted by the costs and time delays involved in litigation, and a feeling that in some circumstances litigation was not the best way to resolve a complex dispute.

Arbitration and mediation are the most common alternative methods used, although other methods involving conciliation, independent expert appraisal or expert determination have also found a place.

In the case of arbitration it is possible to have appointed an acknowledged expert in the field of the dispute, so that a hearing might be conducted more quickly and efficiently, particularly in a technical area, than might be the case if there was a trial by a non-technically qualified judge. Arbitration is widely used in disputes involving builders, engineers and architects.

"Firepoint" Editor Wal Stern is a registered and qualified arbitrator. Having a scientific background, and a wide experience of fire cause and origin, puts him in a good position to settle disputes involving fires. He is the first scientist in Australia, as far as is known, to be involved in arbitration in this area.

Two Firefighters Charged.

Volunteers accused in pizza shop blaze they helped put out.

*Tom Gibb,
Post-Gazette Staff Writer*

Wisconsin State Police Fire Marshal Craig Grassmyer says that when he showed up Thursday to investigate the blaze that had just burned out a local pizza shop, he got a quick offer of help from volunteer firefighter Justin Hoff.

"I was the first one in the building," Grassmyer said Hoff told him. "Don't you want to ask me about the fire?"

As it turned out, Grassmyer did want to question Hoff, and when the talking was done, the fire investigator charged Hoff, 20, and fellow volunteer firefighter Mark Edward Miller, 26, with arson in the fire at Best Way Pizza shop, which left behind an insured loss estimated at \$150,000.

Miller was a clerk at the pizza shop, which is in the Greenwood area. Hoff had worked there, too, until he had a falling out with the owner last year over working hours. Last week, the two worked together in full fire gear, alongside fellow members of the

Greenwood Volunteer Fire Company and other nearby fire companies, to battle the blaze.

Neither had been in previous trouble, regional fire coordinator Thomas Sral said. Now, after about three years on the Greenwood squad -- a year of it during which Hoff was the fire company's recording secretary -- both have been suspended pending the outcome of the case. Hoff was charged over the weekend. A summons was sent to Miller this week.

"They both confessed," Grassmyer said yesterday. "They both said, 'I don't know why.'"

"I just don't understand the situation," said pizza shop owner Kevin Bush, who's spending his days cleaning a shop soaked in water and draped in burnt insulation. "I let Justin go because he didn't want to work some extra hours, but he still came in and ate pizza at the shop regularly."

Miller first told investigators that he was alone closing up the restaurant that night and saw nothing unusual. The arrest affidavit says Miller later admitted that he and Hoff were both there at the midnight closing time -- a little

while after Hoff offered, "Do you want me to burn down the shop so you guys won't have to work today?"

The affidavit says Miller told police he was finishing his closing chores in the pizza shop office when Hoff walked in and told him, "I started the fire. I'll see you later."

Police say Hoff later tearfully admitted lighting paper towels and putting them in a hallway ceiling. Miller told investigators that he got so scared when he saw it that he fled the building and told nobody -- leaving it to passing motorists to spot the fire about a half-hour later and phone for help.

Hoff faces three felony arson charges and was released to his parents' custody. Miller faces a single arson count and was charged by summons.

Yesterday, Miller could not be reached for comment. Hoff declined comment.

Hoff is scheduled for a preliminary hearing tomorrow, but that is expected to be postponed. The arrest affidavit relies largely on the confessions of the two.

"But we have evidence ... physical evidence ... that is overwhelming," Grassmyer said.

Volunteer firefighter suspected of setting fires

Michael Hasch
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Karl Weigand was described by fellow volunteers in his small Elizabeth Township fire department as young, willing to learn and very interested in fighting fires.

Police said the 19-year-old also was very interested in starting them. Weigand, who until Tuesday was second assistant chief in Victory Volunteer Fire Department, was in Allegheny County Jail last night on charges of starting five small fires and calling in eight false alarms, township police said.

A junior firefighter from the same department, identified only as a 16-year-old student in the Elizabeth-Forward School District, faces a detention hearing in Juvenile Court today on charges stemming from some of the cases, police said.

"They were trying to get activity for the fire department. They wanted the thrill, I guess, of answering fire calls," said Elizabeth Township police Chief Charles Tennant.

"I'm disappointed. This just gives a bad name to volunteer firefighters," Victory Fire Chief Gary Hill said.

"The majority of volunteers are excellent; they want to protect property," Hill said.

Weigand joined the department as a junior firefighter about three years ago, Hill said. "He was a young kid, very interested in fire fighting and a very active member," Hill said. "He's been through fire schools and everything."

Weigand's fellow volunteers eventually were impressed enough with his work to elect him second assistant chief, Hill said.

The 16-year-old joined the fire department a few weeks ago as a junior firefighter, Hill said.

Tennant said the rash of false alarms and fires began in March in both Elizabeth Township and neighboring Westmoreland County communities.

Victory - which has between 10 and 15 active members and typically answers about 50 calls a year - is one of eight fire departments in Elizabeth Township.

It is located on Douglass Run Road, just across the Youghiogheny River from the communities of Sutersville and Shaner in Westmoreland County.

Tennant said the most serious fire occurred May 31 when a large trailer loaded with straw to be used to cover grass seeds for a sewage line replacement project was torched.

There also were three brush fires and a propane gas grill that was set on fire, Tennant said. In addition, there were four false alarms in Elizabeth Township and four more in Westmoreland County.

There were no injuries in any of the incidents. Township police, working with Allegheny County detectives and state police from Greensburg, soon realized that an emergency worker was involved, Tennant said.

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SCREENING FOR ARSON – IS IT IMMINENT? IS IT POSSIBLE?

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"He was a loner and insecure...His fires gave him the much-needed attention he craved...He was, after all, the only one who knew how the fires started, and didn't that make him a very important person?" (Orr, J. 1990. Points of origin. Unpublished manuscript. Reprinted from Crime: Burning Ambition by D. Bacon, 1993 [On-line].

John Orr's novel is the story of an arson investigator who lights fires in his spare time. The real punchline however is that Orr, who was at the time a professional firefighter with the Glendale (Californian) Fire Department, was himself subsequently convicted of arson and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Arson in any form is repugnant but even more so when the individual involved is a serving member of the Fire Service. Firefighters who

deliberately light fires are the antithesis of all that the Fire Service represents. Fire Service personnel and the community alike abhors incidents of this nature. Yet the phenomenon appears to be continuing unchecked.

Recent reports in the popular press indicate as many as 15 fires have been lit in Australasia by firefighters (2). Although the incidence of firefighter arson is relatively rare in comparison with the total number of currently serving firefighters, the impact on community faith and Service morale is disproportionately great.

In some instances the arsonist is a longstanding or senior member of the Brigade. The emotional fall-out for other members who have trained and worked alongside these individuals is not to be underestimated. Many describe their reaction as devastating and are incredulous at the betrayal of professional trust that is involved when a firefighter deliberately lights fires.

Clearly, Fire Services are becoming concerned about the threat to their credibility and integrity that is posed by such incidents. In 1998 the issue was raised publicly

for the first time at a national conference of Fire Service personnel from Australia and New Zealand (3). Since that time some Brigades have taken positive steps to address this issue.

This article is to inform the reader of recent developments in the field that may offer alternatives to those Brigades still struggling with the problem of managing firefighter arson.

Who is the firefighter arsonist?

Very little published information is available concerning the firefighter arsonist. Most of what is available concerns overseas incidents. In Australia and New Zealand we are forced largely to rely on media reports of cases and anecdotal information supplied by the peers, subordinates and superiors of those members convicted of lighting fires.

Why this is so is another question altogether. There is, understandably perhaps, a general reluctance to acknowledge this type of activity. However, in supporting a lack of structured research into

the why's and wherefore's of this type of crime, a problem is being perpetuated that would be better managed with more information about the nature of the offence and the type of people who commit it.

What we do know about firefighters who commit arson is that they are different in some important ways from other types of arsonist. Also, in terms of their personal characteristics, these individuals can often be difficult to distinguish from firefighters who do not light fires, making the job of managing the problem even more challenging for Senior Brigade Officers.

The main features that distinguish a firefighter arsonist from other types of arsonist are their generally higher intelligence and more adaptive functioning in society. The key characteristics of these two groups of deliberate firesetters are outlined in the box below.

The typical arsonist

The typical arsonist is often of average to below average intelligence and generally an all-round underachiever. He (most are male) tends to be a loner and finds it difficult to integrate into groups successfully.

Unemployment or employment in low skilled occupations is usual. He has significant difficulties coping with the day-to-day hassles that we all experience.

His difficulties with maintaining employment, sustaining personal relationships and generally coping with life may be related, in part, to a psychiatric illness. He tends to set fires for revenge or for profit and has no particular preference as to type of target chosen. He has chosen fire as an effective outlet for his emotional distress or as a powerful weapon that he can wield without having to personally confront the victim.

The firefighter arsonist

The firefighter arsonist, on the other hand, is frequently of average to slightly above average intelligence and, to all intents and purposes, functions successfully in society. He is often employed, although frequent job and/or career changes may be a feature of his occupational history.

At a superficial level he is socially adept, however, those who get to know him better may describe him as arrogant, cocky, or over-bearing. Younger individuals in this category

may be described as initially shy but rapidly gain in confidence, tend to be over-eager to please, or attention seeking.

His motive for setting fires is not clear, as many firefighter arsonists have refused to explain their actions. However, the nature of the offences (usually targeting derelict buildings, scrub, or rubbish skips) suggest it may be for the excitement in attending the fire, to feel part of a well-functioning team that is involved in playing an important role in society, or even to create enough work to justify the resources allocated to the Brigade (particularly in country areas).

Many who have worked with a firefighter who was subsequently convicted of lighting fires express anger at how they were duped. They describe a Fire Service member who was keen, enthusiastic, and always willing to be involved in training and other Fire Service activities.

These individuals seem to be committed members of the team, giving freely of their time to further the interests of the Brigade. It is difficult to reconcile the evidence with the person they know and often, even after a guilty conviction has been recorded, colleagues may find it hard to accept.

The similarity between firefighters who light fires and those who do not emphasises how difficult it is to spot the "threat from within". While the typical arsonist demonstrates some clear characteristics that help to distinguish him from other members of the community, the firefighter arsonist is not so easily identifiable.

Arson prevention

The best method for the prevention of arson is for the match never to be lit. Similarly, for the Fire Service interested in protecting itself against this kind of threat the ideal solution is not to recruit these individuals in the first place. Recent developments in the area of firefighter selection can help make this a reality.

Two approaches are now available which have been designed to specifically address the issue of firefighter arson. Both of these approaches target the problem at the selection phase of the recruitment of volunteer firefighters.

Firefighter Selection and Screening Interview

One approach involves utilising a purpose-built semi-structured interview format. The Firefighter Selection and Screening Interview (FSSI) has been

designed to cover several key areas of an individual's life and experiences that have been linked to characteristics of firefighter arsonists.

In addition to screening for propensity to light fires, the FSSI also considers a range of behavioural characteristics that may indicate potential to adjust successfully to an operational role within the Fire Service. Initially designed for use with the volunteer component of the fire service, the FSSI is able to be adapted for use in the selection of paid personnel as well.

The interview is administered by trained interviewers and offers those involved in the selection of operational Fire Service members an additional tool to help guide selection decisions. While it is not an absolute predictor of propensity to light fires, it provides for a more structured and formalised step in the screening process.

Arson Screening and Prediction Questionnaire

An alternative approach is a questionnaire that can be given to applicants during the selection process. The Arson Screening and Prediction (ASAP) instrument covers a range of areas related to

characteristics of the volunteer firefighter arsonist. It comprises 40 questions and requires approximately 30 minutes to complete. Each question provides for four responses and the applicant is instructed to select the response that best describes their feelings about the question.

The questionnaire can be administered, scored and interpreted by field level fire administrators. The ASAP has yet to be formally assessed as to its reliability and validity. However, it has been reportedly constructed on the basis of valid and reliable psychometric instruments and crosschecked against relevant literature. Once again, the questionnaire does not offer an absolute predictor of arson propensity, but instead compares a subject's response with characteristics of the volunteer firefighter arsonist profile.

A new weapon in the Fire Service selection arsenal

Neither the FSSI nor the ASAP is designed to serve as a criterion for acceptance or rejection of any applicant into the Fire Service. These tools are best utilised in conjunction with well-considered selection practices and

procedures conducted by experienced Fire Service personnel.

Each of these screening devices are currently being trialed in Fire Services overseas and their performance will be watched with interest. The advent of the FSSI and ASAP offers a new approach to dealing with arson in the ranks and represents the development of additional weapons in the arsenal against firefighter arson¹.

¹ Correspondence may be addressed to the author at PO Box 164, Gungahlin ACT 2912, Australia or email: prandall@ozemail.com.au

² It is not possible to obtain more accurate figures at this time as police and court records are not coded by occupational status of the offender.

³ Australasian Fire Authorities Council Conference, *Forging Partnerships*, 9-11 October 1998, Hobart Tasmania.

⁴ For more information about the FSSI or ASAP contact the author.

About the Author

Rebekah Doley is a criminal behaviour analyst and consulting psychologist specialising in the analysis of arson and fraud. She has completed a major research project in the United Kingdom focusing on the criminal behaviour analysis of arson while completing her Master of Science (Investigative Psychology).

She is currently undertaking a combined Ph.D. / Master of Psychology (Clinical) program at The Flinders University of South Australia studying the issue of deliberate firesetting with a view to identifying alternative strategies for better managing this crime at both state and national levels.

Rebekah's background is in human resource management where she has had extensive experience in the areas of recruitment, selection, training and personnel development in both private and public sector environments.

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The chief explained that in calling in the false alarms, the 911 caller used the words "structure fire" - terminology usually used by firefighters and police - to describe house fires. "One of the suspects actually got on the fire radio one time to call in a fire," Tennant said. "We were able to identify that voice as the same one making the phone calls."

Emergency officials were able to trace some of the 911 calls to a cell phone owned by Weigand, Tennant said. "We've been watching (Weigand) for the past month or so," Hill said. "You always keep hoping it isn't him."

Tennant said Weigand was brought in for questioning Monday night and arrested. The juvenile was then brought in and charged. Weigand faces 21 charges including arson, causing or risking a catastrophe, false alarms, loitering or prowling, harassment by communication and corruption of minors, Tennant said.

The juvenile, faces eight charges Tennant said. Victory firefighters will hold a special meeting to formally consider suspending Weigand who already has been relieved of his office, Hill said.

BUILDING THE PLATFORM FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

Drew Lindsay

Based on a lecture recently given to Claims Staff from Royal & Sun Alliance and Tyndall Life, Sydney, concerning the steps to a successful interview.

As Insurance Claims Staff and in particular, Insurance Investigators, it is unwise to simply launch into an interview with a person who has lodged an Insurance claim, without taking the time to fully assess the specific situation, and taking time to build the steps to the platform on which the interview will occur.

This 'platform building' process is relevant in phone contact by Insurance Claims Staff with an Insured, but more so when a face to face encounter is to ensue.

In more than 2 decades of conducting interviews, I have learned that there are four basic steps which the interviewer should take prior to taking his/her laptop or more appropriately, tape recorder, from the brief case and commencing the interview.

STEP ONE

It might sound a bit simplistic, but one must thoroughly read all information relevant to the Insured, including the Proposal Information, Claim Form and the Claims file generally. This is where the

Claims Handling Officer can be of great assistance to the Investigator.

The Investigator initially has to know as much as possible about the Insured as can be made available. The following information is vital:

AGE
GENDER
NATIONALITY
OCCUPATION
MARITAL STATUS
PLACE OF RESIDENCE

The reason you need to know the age and gender of the Insured is because that will determine how you initially speak with them during that vital first phone call, and it will also dictate how you conduct yourself during the interview.

My father always told me that it was proper to respect one's elders. I'm not sure that the advice works generally in every situation, but it seems to me that if you are interviewing someone who is quite a bit older than yourself, then it is wise to at least attempt to communicate the fact that you are aware and appreciate that they have more experience in life generally than you, even if you have crammed more living into your years, than they.

Young and in-experienced investigators often tend to overcome the age barrier by being over assertive or even aggressive and intimidating, right from the first contact, hoping that it will give them

the AUTHORITY to carry them successfully through the interview.

Real AUTHORITY is earned over time, and has little to do with being aggressive or intimidating. It does not come with a piece of paper with a red seal thereon, or your fancy business card.

Be aware of who you are in relation to the person you are to interview. Continue to honestly monitor yourself,.....your age, experience and ability and be prepared to make adjustments specifically geared to the person you are to confront.

STEP TWO

The initial phone contact with the insured is very important. If that goes wrong, the subsequent interview will probably be unsuccessful.

As soon as an Insured knows that their claim is 'under investigation' they will experience a number of emotions ranging from straight out anger, to fear, anxiety and resentment.

If the Insured is attempting fraud, the range of emotions felt may be amplified. If the Insured has done nothing wrong, they will still feel that the Insurer has declared them dishonest, simply because they are now 'under investigation'.

Insurance Investigators will probably spend more of their time confirming genuine claims than exposing fraudulent claims. We must therefore, NEVER pre judge any claim, even if numerous fraud indicators are present.

Getting back to that first vital phone call..... Be pleasant. Don't use statements such as "your claim is under investigation" or "there are very suspicious matters associated with your claim."

I don't believe the insured should be lulled into a false sense of security by initially sweet talking them so that you can pounce on them later during the interview. They obviously know there is a problem, or you wouldn't be on the phone in the first place.

If there are major problems with their claim, in most cases they should be told about this, but that is perhaps best left for the actual interview process, rather than the initial contact. Initially however, make them aware that the Insurer requires some further inquiries to be made, but don't make it sound like the Spanish Inquisition.

STEP THREE

The face to face meeting is the final step to building the platform on which the formal interview will commence. There is a fourth step, which I will cover shortly, but it is actually taken well before the first step.

Generally you will be on the Insured's territory for the interview, and I personally believe that this is the appropriate venue for most Insurance type interviews to be conducted.

It will be in the insured's home or office, and that can be somewhat intimidating for the young or inexperienced investigator. If you are in that category, resist the urge to strut in all official and full of authority in order to compensate for being in unfamiliar territory.

It's their ground, so let them have that advantage for a while. It will make the insured feel more comfortable and ultimately give you a better basis for a successful interview.

Resist the urge to direct them to a specific chair at the table, or to burst open your brief case and stack up very official files and a rather menacing tape recorder in their face. Just relax and let them direct you about for a little while.

Chat about things which initially have nothing whatsoever to do with their claim. They need time to check you out. If you're game, pat their dog and if their cat tries to jump on your lap, don't grab it by the throat and hurl it across the room.....even if you hate cats.

I've had so many people quickly warm to my presence because their dog liked me, or because I commented on their choice of movies.

Be honest with the insured as to the purpose of your visit, and if there are problems with the claim which have to be addressed, do it openly,..... but don't rush things. You're in what I term, 'a mini relationship' with each and every interviewee, and the basis for your presence has to be established as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

STEP FOUR

This should go without saying, but please pay attention to your grooming and dress.

Years ago when I was a junior Detective within the NSW Police Department, and working in some fairly rough areas of Sydney, I learned a subtle lesson from some very smart Detectives concerning 'Physical Presentation'.

Most professional people should appreciate what this means, especially working in the Corporate Sector, however let me underline the fact that if you have bad breath, dirty fingernails and a crumpled suit which hardly fits, you may have your professional ability aligned with your general appearance.

COMMENT

If the above four steps are followed, no matter what your experience, qualifications or age may be, you will have built the platform on which the very vital interview with an insured, can be conducted.