



Firefighter Fatality Investigations

Chief Debra Knight



- State Fire Marshal
- Doctor of Jurisprudence – South Texas College of Law
- Colonel, United States Army – Retired in 2014
- FEMA Region VI Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officer
- Former Deputy Commissioner – Compliance and Investigations, Division of Worker's Comp
- 30+ years of experience in administrative and criminal law, and insurance and compliance analysis.



State Fire Marshal's Office



Assistant Chief Chuck Allen



- Bachelor's Degree from West Texas A&M in Emergency Management
- Master's Degree from Grand Canyon in Leadership with Emphasis in Disaster Preparedness and Executive Fire Leadership
- Master Fire Inspector and Fire/Arson Investigator
- Master Peace Officer
- Certified Fraud Examiner
- Former County Fire Marshal/EMC
- Former Criminal Investigator with a Sheriff's Office
- Over 30 years of public safety (Municipal, County, and State)
- TFMA-Board of Directors and Assistant Chaplain



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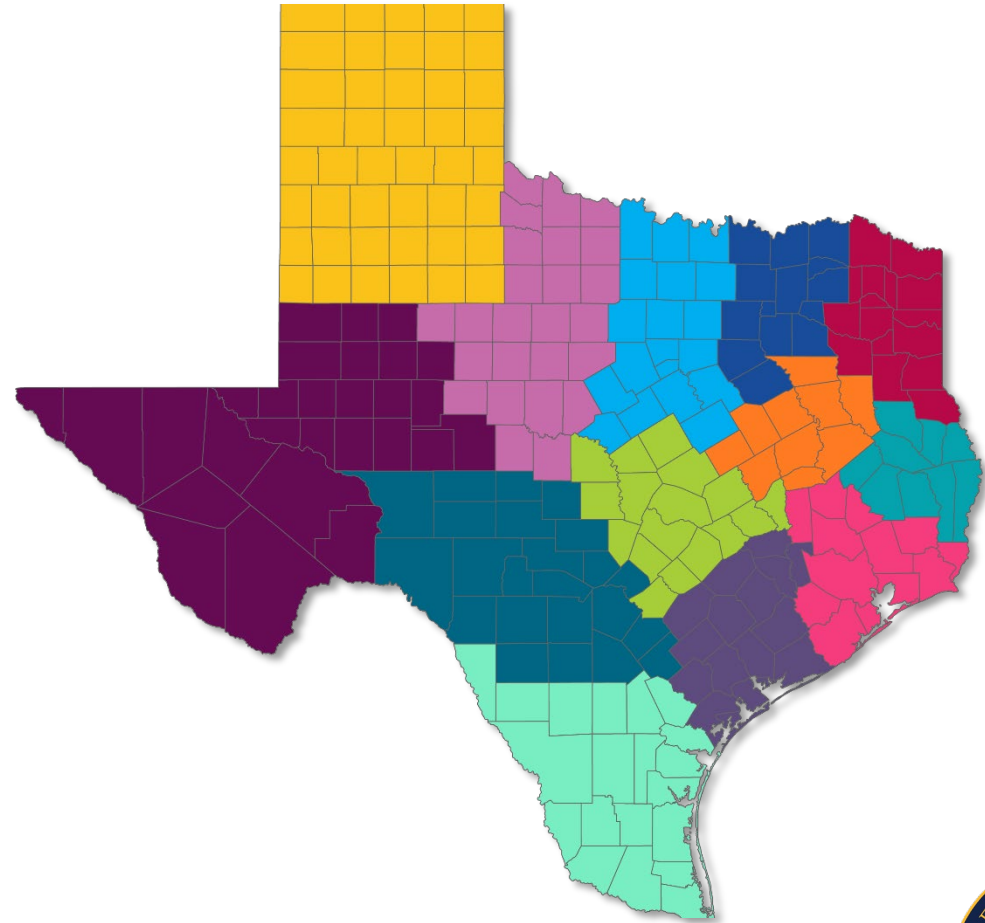
Mission and Function

Mission

The Texas State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) will reduce the loss of life and property through prevention, education, and protection.

Function

- The primary function of SFMO is to reduce the risk and impact of fire.
- The function directly and dramatically impacts TDI's mission to protect insurance consumers.



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Firefighter Fatality Investigations



TX Govt Code § 417.0075

- If a firefighter's death occurs:
 - in the line of duty or
 - in connection with an on-duty incident in Texas;
- Then the state fire marshal **shall** investigate the circumstances of the death and any factors that may have contributed to it.

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Firefighter Fatality Investigations



In conducting an FFF investigation, the state fire marshal has the same powers as those granted generally to the state fire marshal under Section 417.007 of the Texas Government Code

The state fire marshal shall coordinate the investigative efforts of local government officials and may enlist established fire service organizations and private entities to assist in the investigation

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Firefighter Fatality Investigations

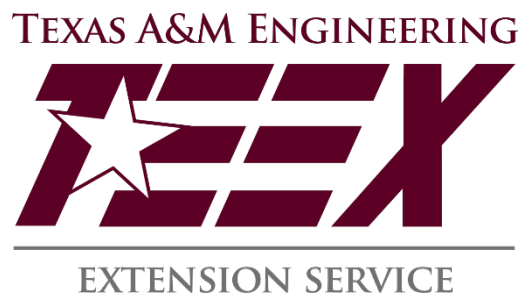
- Information gathered in an investigation is subject to Section [552.108](#) regarding certain law enforcement exceptions to open records requirements.
- The authority granted to the state fire marshal under this section shall not limit in any way the authority of the county or municipal fire marshal to conduct the county or municipal fire marshal's own investigation into the death of a firefighter within the county or municipal fire marshal's jurisdiction.



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Firefighter Fatality Investigations



These investigations are conducted in cooperation with fire-service organizations such as, but not limited to, the State Firefighter's & Fire Marshals' Association, Texas Fire Chiefs Association, Texas State Association of Firefighters, Texas Fire Marshal's Association, Texas Commission on Fire Protection, Texas A&M Forest Service, Texas Chapter International Association of Arson Investigators, and Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service.

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Purpose of Firefighter Fatality Investigations

The FFF investigations shall be conducted to provide valuable information to the fire service by examining the lessons learned from each incident to prevent future loss of life and property.

- Circumstances surrounding the death
- Origin and Cause of the fire
- Condition of the structure
- Suppression Operations

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The Investigation Process



- Notification of an FFF/Critical Injury
- Scene response-if Fire Suppression related or warranted
- Origin and Cause Investigation-if warranted
- FFF Investigation
 - Tactics Review
- The FFF Report
- FFF Annual Report

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Firefighter Fatality-When to Notify

If you have a critically injured firefighter or death, immediately notify the SFMO.

Need to secure all their equipment.

Need to be able to document apparatus and hose placements if suppression related.

Calling **512-676-6780** will get immediate response from SFMO.

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When also to Notify the SFMO

Heart
Attack/Stroke-
while on duty

Sudden Cardiac
Arrest at Scene
or Station

Suicide at
Station

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Critical Injuries-Notification ASAP



Severe Burns



Multi-System Trauma



Heart Attack/Stroke where on life supports



Any injury or illness that is defined as critical by medical staff

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Suicides

Increasing number
of both on duty
and off duty
suicides

Currently no
tracking of suicides
in the fire service

Notify the SFMO of
any suicide
whether they were
on duty or off duty.

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SFMO Response

We will

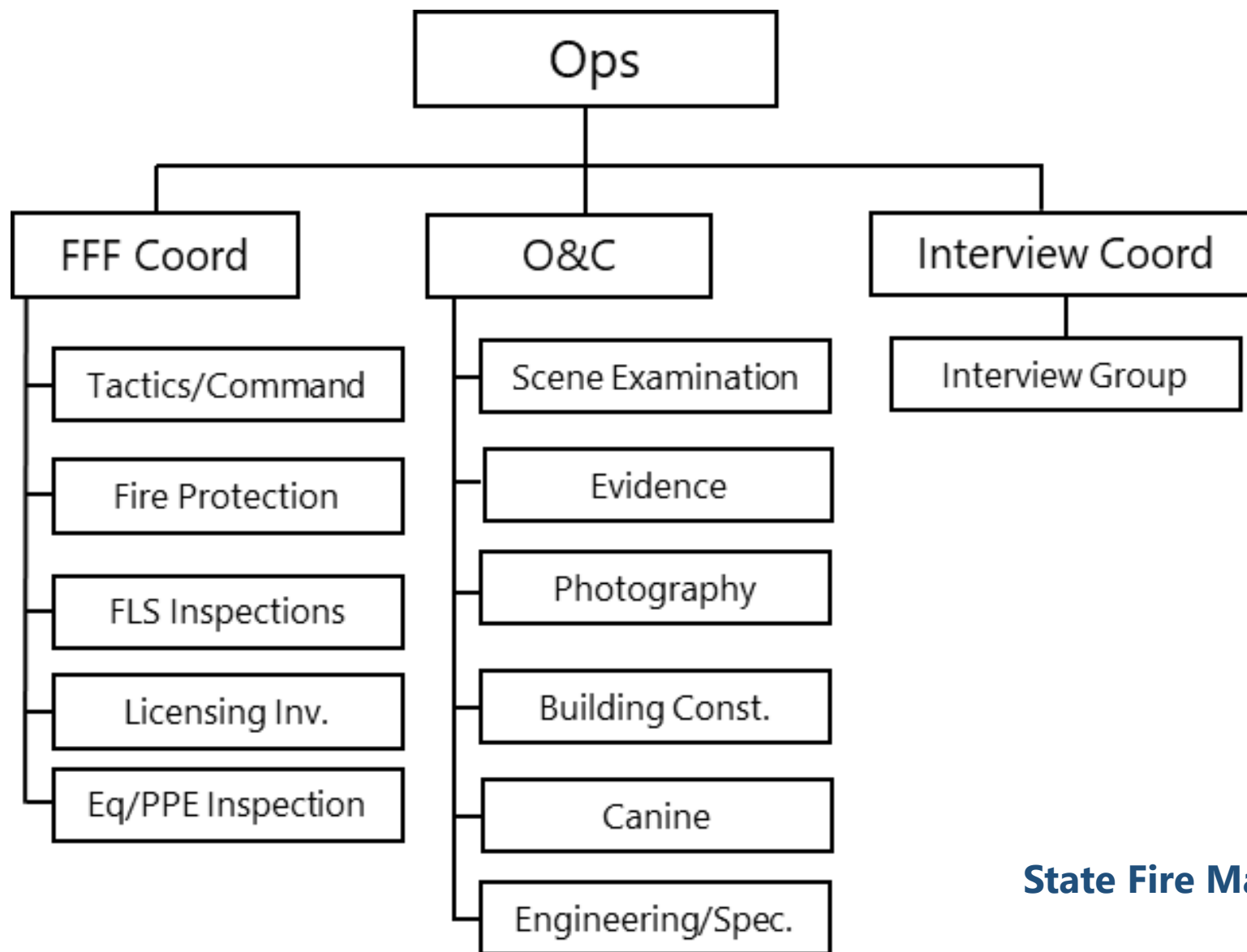
- Communicate with other State Partners
 - Texas LODD Task Force
 - Texas Fire Chiefs Association
- Communicate with the Department

Note: The SFMO response for firefighter fatalities may vary greatly. For example, a medical incident at the station will not usually warrant the same response as a FFF while engaged in fire suppression operations

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Firefighter Fatality Investigation Operations



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Things to do after Notification



After SFMO notification

- Secure the Scene
 - Establish a security perimeter with the assistance of local Law Enforcement
- Notify next of Kin, in person
 - Follow your department SOP

NOTE: If a fire is determined to have been intentionally set, the death of a firefighter or civilian may lead to a homicide investigation, where every bit of evidence is important, and must be protected.

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Things to do after Notification

- Do not disturb the scene except to the extent necessary to complete extinguishment of any fire.
- Do not conduct any salvage and overhaul operations other than that required to complete extinguishment. Attempt to leave furnishings and building contents in their original location.

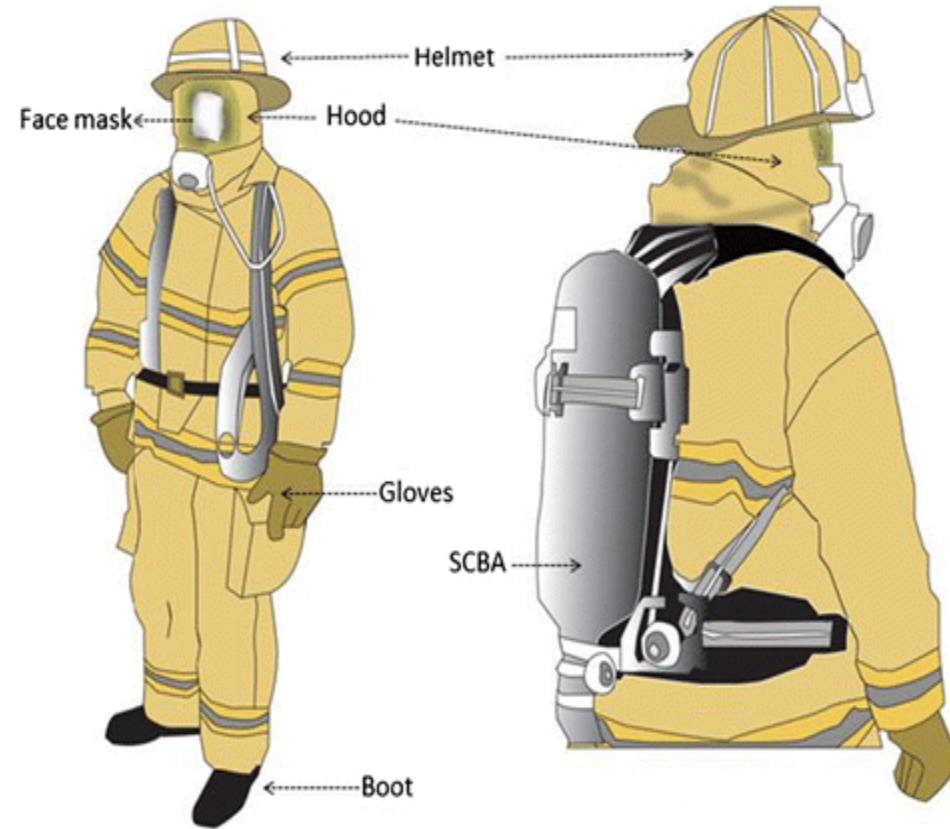


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Things to do after Notification

Do not move any firefighting hand tools, hose lines, or other portable equipment in the area of the incident.



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Things to do after Notification

Any personal equipment removed in resuscitation efforts away from the incident scene should be collected, handled carefully, and stored in a secure, locked location. Any equipment that is wet should be allowed to air dry.



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Firefighter Recovery

- If the body must be removed from the scene prior to the arrival of the SFMO investigative team, please photograph the location of the body and surrounding area before removal.
- Do not mark the body location with paint-it may cause false positives for flammable liquids if samples of fire debris are taken.
- SFMO prefers that our Investigators are present to document the deceased and surrounding area.

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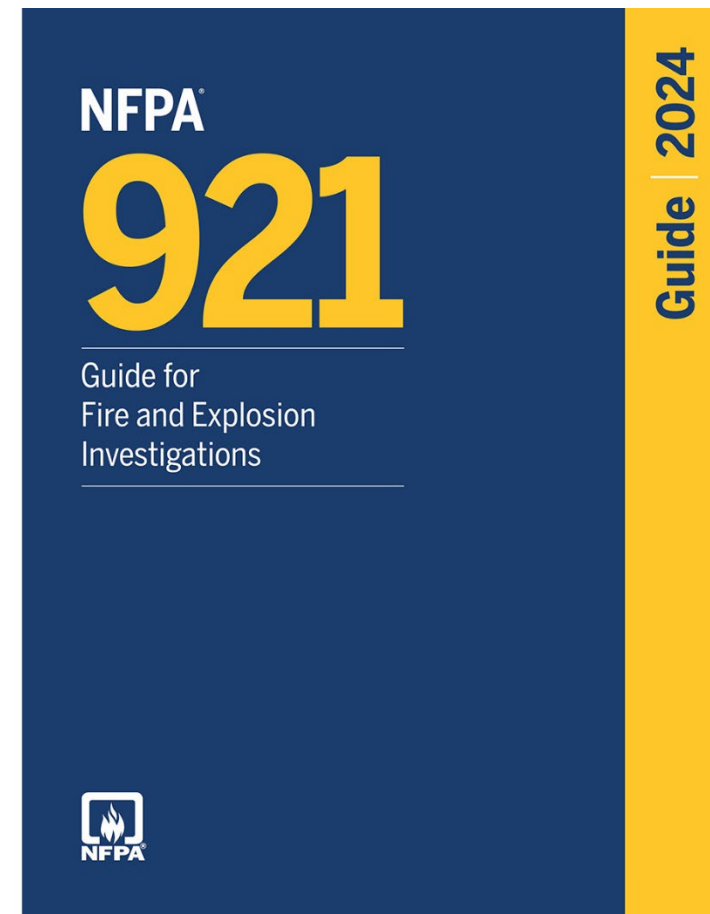


Methodology

FFF investigations are complex investigative incidents. The investigation is a cooperative and unified effort between the FFF investigation team and the O&C team.

Fire Investigation Methodology

- The O&C of the fire related to the FFF shall be conducted in accordance with established national and scientific best practices. Although not limited to, the following documents shall be considered when conducting the O&C investigation:
 - NFPA 921: Guide to Fire and Explosion Investigations
 - NFPA 1033: Standard for Professional Qualifications of a Fire Investigator
 - Kirk's Fire Investigation Handbook
 - NFPA Fire Protection Handbook
 - Other applicable literature and treatises



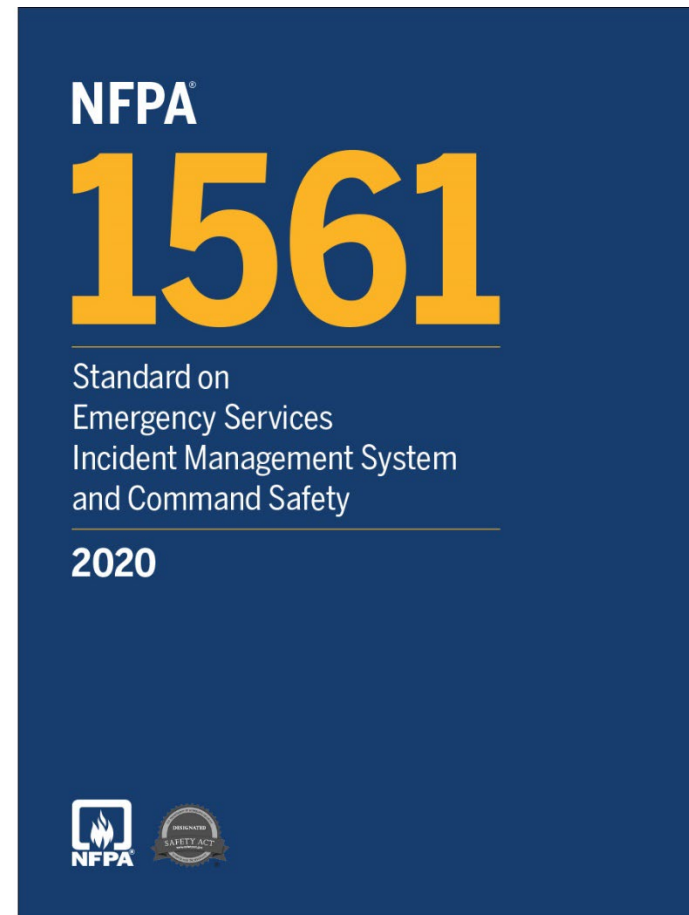
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Methodology

FFF INVESTIGATION METHODOLOGY

- The FFF investigation shall be conducted in accordance with established national best practices. In addition to other literature, the following documents shall be considered when conducting the FFF investigation:
 - United States Fire Administration: Autopsy Protocol-if deemed necessary
 - NFPA 1500: Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program
 - NFPA 1561: Standard on Emergency Services Incident Management System and Command Safety
 - NFPA 1582: Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments
 - All other incident applicable NFPA standards
 - Other applicable literature and treatises



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Autopsy

- Misconception that an autopsy must be performed to be eligible for Public Safety Officer Benefit (PSOB).
- In the case of a medical death, it is presumed that the death occurred on duty because of the actions they were taking at work.
- Death certificate is required for PSOB.

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Tactics Review-Metro/Non-Metro/Volunteer

Metro Department

The following city fire departments are classified as metropolitan departments.

- Austin
- Dallas (2025)
- El Paso
- Fort Worth
- Houston
- San Antonio

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Tactics Review-Metro/Non-Metro/Volunteer

Non-Metro Department

All other paid departments will be considered non-metropolitan.

Volunteer Department

A volunteer fire department has no paid members and consists solely of volunteer firefighters.

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Tactics Review Team

- The team will be responsible for reviewing and analyzing all aspects of the fire suppression response during a FFF that occurs on a fire scene.
- Shall provide invaluable assistance in evaluating and better understanding the events and circumstances that led to the FFF.
- The team will provide a written report of their findings and recommendations to the FFF Coordinator.
- The team will review incidents in which a fire department has experienced an FFF.

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Responsibility of Tactics Review Team

- Will be to examine, evaluate and determine the circumstances that led to the FFF. Additionally, the team shall prepare a written report of their findings and recommendations to prevent future similar events.
- The team shall produce a written report of their findings and recommendations. The findings shall be based on factual events of the incident and supported through interviews, documentation, evidence or a combination of these items. The recommendations shall be based on the facts of the incident and based on current and accepted fire service literature.
- The written report must be agreed upon by all members of the team. If a conflict of opinion persists within the team, the FFF Coordinator shall have final authority to remedy the conflict as related to the content of the report.
- The team shall not produce separate or independent findings, recommendations, or reports outside of the official report released by the SFMO.

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Firefighter Fatality Review Panel



After completion of the FFF Report, the Review Panel will

- Provide suggestions
- Feedback
- Critical Insight into the
 - Findings
 - Recommendations
 - Overall Report Content

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Firefighter Fatality Report Process

- Initial Draft Report
- Review by FFF Review Panel
- Administrative Review
- Chief Officer Review
- Preparation of Final Report
- FFF Investigation Report Distribution

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Firefighter Fatality Investigations in FY 2023

- 10 Firefighter fatality incident investigations
 - 6 on duty medical events
 - 4 vehicles accidents
 - 1 suicide
- 7 Volunteer departments
- 3 Paid departments

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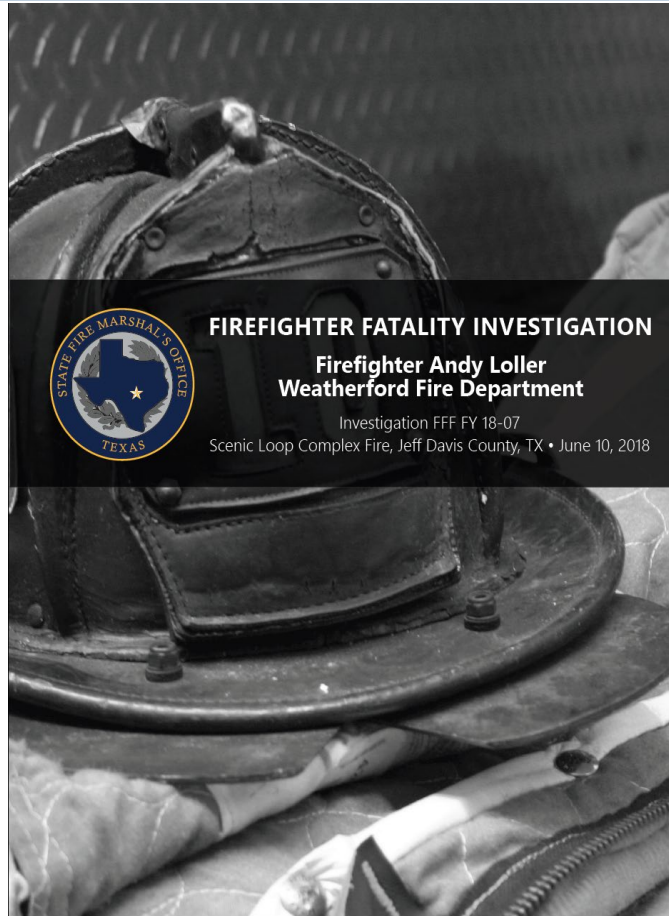
Firefighter Fatality Investigations FY 24

- 4 FFF Investigations Initiated
 - 1- Responding to station
 - 3- Medical
- 4 Volunteer Departments

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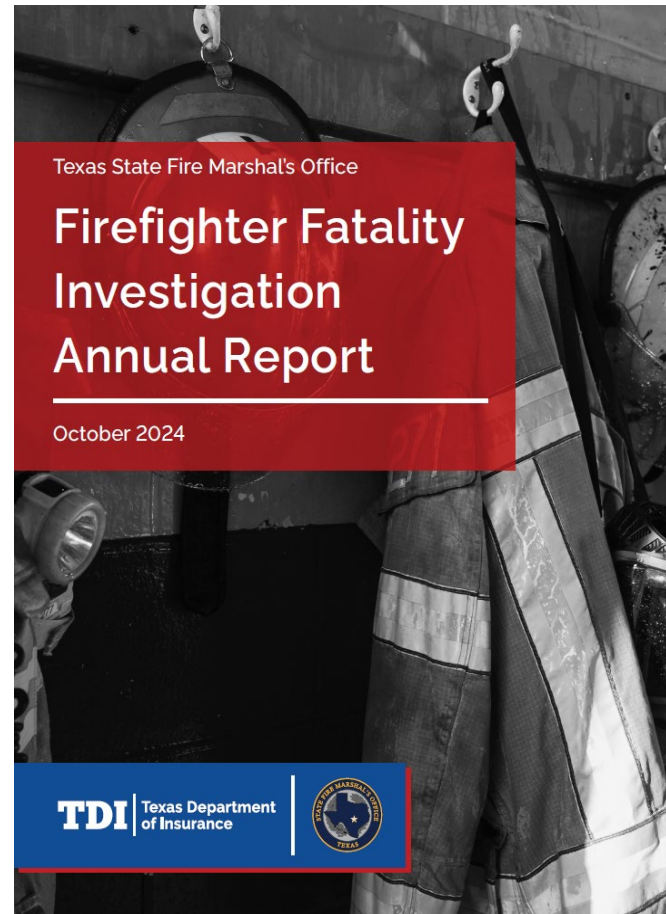


Firefighter Fatality Reporting Requirement



The state fire marshal shall release a report concerning an investigation conducted under this section on completion of the investigation.

Not later than October 31 of each year, the state fire marshal shall deliver to the commissioner a detailed report about the findings of each investigation conducted under this section in the preceding year.



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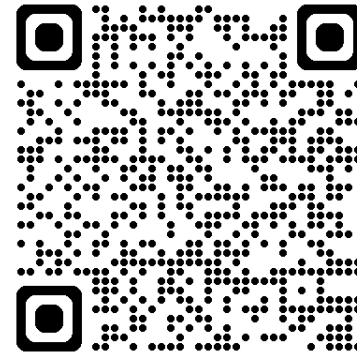


Firefighter Fatality Investigations



FY 2024 Firefighter Fatality Annual
Report is available:

<https://www.tdi.texas.gov/fire/documents/fmfff2024.pdf>



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Firefighter Fatality Investigations

- Lt. Todd Johse
 - 512-676-6780- Main
 - 512-417-7385-Cell
- Chief Chuck Allen
 - 512-417-7443
- Chief Debra Knight
 - 512-567-8482



State Fire Marshal's Office



Contact SFMO

Main

Media Relations

Fire & Life Safety Inspections

Licensing Administration

Licensing Investigations

Fire/Arson Investigations

Outreach, Policy, and Research

TEXTFIRS

PPC Oversight

Open Records

512-676-6800, Fire.Marshal@tdi.texas.gov

512-676-6595, MediaRelations@tdi.texas.gov

512-676-6795, FireInspection@tdi.texas.gov

512-676-6800 (option 1), FMLicensing@tdi.texas.gov

512-676-6802, SFMOLicensingInvestigations@tdi.texas.gov

512-676-6780, FireInvestigations@tdi.texas.gov

512-676-6800 (option 2), Fire.Marshal@tdi.texas.gov

512-676-6800 (option 4), TEXTFIRS@tdi.texas.gov

512-676-6800 (option 3), PPCOversight@tdi.texas.gov

Openrecords@tdi.texas.gov

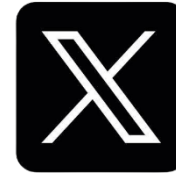
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State Fire Marshal's Office Presentation Survey



TexasStateFireMarshal



@TXSFMO



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TexasDepartmentofInsurance

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SFMO Contact Information

Fire Investigation Contact



Fire Inspections Contact



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Prevention • Education • Protection