



Sheridan Police Department
Policies and Procedures
28.16
Chapter 28 – Call Response
Section 16 – Fire Response & Arson

Date: January 1, 2013
Revised: 06/17/2022

Signature:

The Sheridan Police Department will assist the responding fire departments at the scene of fires when requested. The police department will assume criminal investigation responsibilities upon the suspicion (or determination) of arson by fire department investigators.

28.16.1 Response to Fire Scene

- A. The responding fire department has the responsibility to respond to and extinguish fires.
- B. Upon request, officers shall respond to reported fires. While en route to, and upon arrival at the scene, officers shall:
 - 1. Attempt to determine if any person(s) are inside the involved fire area. Due to a lack of equipment and training officers are discouraged from entering a structure fire unless there are extreme circumstances and lives are in danger;
 - 2. Note any vehicles observed leaving the scene;
 - 3. Note the description of persons leaving the scene;
 - 4. Note weather conditions (i.e. - wind speed and direction, precipitation, lightning, etc.). These factors will aid in determining the natural path of fire spread;
 - 5. Note the condition of any involved structure in relation to the determined weather conditions (i.e. - windows open during cold weather, closed during warm weather, etc.);
 - 6. Identify the location of visible fire within a structure or area. Special notice should be taken of the area of most intense fire, and the existence of multiple fire locations;
 - 7. Identify the presence of barriers (i.e. - barricades, fallen trees, cables or trash containers) that may obstruct the fire department's arrival or entry;
 - 8. Note the color of smoke and flames and the speed and direction of fire spread; and
 - 9. Be cognizant of the dress, attitudes, statements or behaviors of owners, occupants, witnesses and onlookers at the scene.
- C. When present, the police department will assist with the following functions at the scene of a fire:
 - 1. Provide traffic and crowd control, as needed;
 - 2. Ensure that firefighters and their equipment are protected while performing their duties:
 - a. Ensure that the area around the fire scene is clear so that the fire department can position their equipment in front of and around the fire site;
 - b. Position police vehicles out of the way of fire equipment; and
 - c. Ensure that vehicles do not drive over fire hoses.
 - 3. Consult with the fire department incident commander before clearing the scene; and

4. Securing the scene and making arrangements for investigation, when arson is suspected.
 - a. When the fire department has determined the fire to be extinguished, the scene will be secured to protect the crime scene.
 - b. There will be no entry into the scene until the police and fire investigator have met and determined an appropriate course of action.
- D. The assigned officer shall prepare a report of all fire-related incidents that have been deemed of a "suspicious nature" by fire department officials and those that resulted in life-threatening injuries or death.

28.16.2 Responsibilities

- A. The responding fire departments shall be responsible to determine cause and origin of fires.
 1. Fire department investigators may obtain an administrative search warrant for this purpose.
 2. Police department personnel will assist in the initial investigation if requested.
- B. When arson is suspected or determined, the Sheridan Police Department will be responsible for the criminal investigation of the incident.
- C. Unless exigent circumstances are present, law enforcement officers will obtain a warrant, or documented consent, prior to entering a fire crime scene.

28.16.3 Arson Investigation

- A. The preliminary investigation report should include:
 1. The identities of all persons present in the building at the time of the fire, their location at the time the fire was discovered, and their current whereabouts and condition. If persons are unaccounted for, the fire department incident commander shall be notified immediately.
 2. Name, address and telephone number of:
 - a. Property owner;
 - b. Residents or tenants, if any;
 - c. Person(s) who discovered the fire;
 - d. Person(s) who reported the fire;
 - e. First responder(s) on the scene; and
 - f. Bystanders, if any. Particular attention should be given to persons photographing the fire, including media personnel, or persons who have been noticed at other fires, or who are acting abnormal at the fire scene.
 3. Date and time the fire was discovered and reported.
 4. Name of the insurance company insuring the property and the name of the insurance agent.
 5. Officers conducting preliminary fire investigations should note the cause of the fire and its point of origin in their report, as determined by the fire investigator.
 6. The new addresses and telephone numbers of displaced persons.
- B. Officers shall whenever possible, interview and obtain written statements from:
 1. The person(s) who discovered the fire;
 2. The person(s) who reported the fire;
 3. All persons present in the building at the time of the fire;
 4. The owner and occupants of the property; and

5. Any other witnesses.
- C. The crime scene shall be processed, including:
 1. Photographing the scene;
 2. Sketching the scene; and
 3. Searching the scene in order to locate, collect and preserve any physical evidence.
 - a. Evidence shall be collected pursuant to the department's policy governing the preservation, collection and processing of evidence (see chapter 12).
 - b. The detective and fire investigator will determine how best to collect and store evidence to meet departmental procedures and legal requirements.
 - c. Whenever suspect samples (i.e. - wood or carpet) subjected to flammable liquids are collected for laboratory analysis, control samples of unaffected material shall also be collected.
 - d. Efforts will be made to eliminate cross contamination of samples upon collection. (For example an officer collecting a carpet sample from a bedroom will use a different set of gloves and scissors when collecting a carpet sample from the living room).
- D. The department may seek assistance from the State Fire Marshal or Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) when appropriate.
- E. The scene will not be released until both the fire investigator and assigned detective agree that scene security is no longer needed.
- F. Detectives shall attempt to establish an arsonist's motive for setting a fire. Motives may include, but are not limited to:
 1. Financial gain by the quick liquidation of a business, settlement of an estate, termination of a business partnership, or collection of fire insurance benefits;
 2. Hatred, revenge, spite, or jealousy;
 3. An action to gain attention for a cause;
 4. Concealment of another crime; or
 5. Mental illness such as pyromania.

28.16.4 Fire Suppression

- A. The fire department shall be notified whenever an officer of the department extinguishes a fire.
- B. Notification shall include the type, location and seriousness of the fire, and the action taken.
- C. The fire department shall determine whether or not to respond based on the reported information.
- D. Caution should be used in attempting fire suppression efforts of a motor vehicle whose engine is on fire. If the hood is opened and raised, the fire will be fueled by additional oxygen. Subsequently, the flames will be increased dramatically, exposing the officer to a high risk of being seriously burned by the flames.
- F. If an empty vehicle is engulfed in flames, the primary concern is to evacuate the immediate area due to the risk of explosion of the vehicle's fuel tank or the load being transported.