



## Fire Investigation and Reporting

### Introduction

This document is intended to aid those involved in fire investigations better understand the roles and responsibilities assigned to the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) by *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992* (referred to in this document as “the *Act*”). The *Act* mandates the OFC’s responsibilities and authorities when it comes to determining the cause, origin and circumstance of fires. We have worked closely with police, the insurance industry and other agencies that have mandated interests in fire investigation. Based on those consultations, as well as our obligations under legislation, the OFC has developed internal policies and procedures regulating both the conduct of fire investigations and our relationships with other interested agencies. Those issues, and the critical importance of the *Team Concept*, are explored here.

### Investigation Mandate of the Office of the Fire Commissioner

The *Canadian Constitution Act* and *British North American Act* assign the responsibility for fire prevention and protection to provincial authority. In Saskatchewan, investigation of fire losses is conducted under the authority of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*. The *Act* assigns responsibility and provides authority to enable persons, designated under the *Act*, to fulfill their assigned duties. Personnel assigned<sup>1</sup> these duties by the *Act* have broad powers for the purpose of completing investigations, including:

- The authority to enter a property where a fire has occurred.
- The authority to restrict others from entering the fire scene.
- The right to examine and to take items from the fire scene.
- The authority to take persons or equipment onto a fire scene.

The investigation of fires under *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*, is an administrative, rather than judicial, function. The purpose is to gather statistical information regarding the origin, cause and circumstances surrounding fire losses. The OFC is mandated by the *Act* to collect and disseminate information respecting fire losses in Saskatchewan. In order to enhance fire safety, the OFC also has a discretionary mandate<sup>2</sup> to investigate fires involving circumstances of special interest. In addition, the OFC has been assigned roles and responsibilities to both assist and train local assistants<sup>3</sup> in the investigation of fire losses.

Provincial interest in these essential statistics is focused on programs related to fire loss prevention. Complete and accurate data allows the effectiveness of existing programs to be evaluated and the need for new programs identified. Statistics are used to develop prevention

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<sup>1</sup> The duty of investigating fire losses is assigned to the local assistant for the jurisdiction under **Section 15 – Investigation and report by local assistants** of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*. Insurance personnel are required to report losses under **Section 37 – Reports by insurance companies and adjusters** of the *Act*, but have no duties, nor powers of investigation under the *Act*. Duties and powers for police under the *Act* are as directed by, or under, the supervision of a local assistant.

<sup>2</sup> See **Section 16 – Investigation** of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*.

<sup>3</sup> As defined by **Section 2 (h) – Interpretation**, and detailed in **Section 8 – Delegation to local assistants**, of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*.

programs such as *Risk Watch* and *Learn Not to Burn*, training programs for fire fighters, to identify necessary improvements to fire safety regulations and help to identify and plan municipal assistance programs. A number of other agencies (such as Health Canada's Consumer Product Safety branch) with interests in public safety also rely on statistics provided by the OFC. Complete and accurate statistics are essential for these agencies to effectively evaluate, revise and manage their programs.

Fire loss investigations under the authority of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992* are conducted in a way that supports the investigation work of other interested agencies, such as insurance and police. Investigations conducted under the *Act* identify the origin, cause and circumstance resulting in the fire loss. This information is normally readily available to other interested agencies, with the goal of assisting them in completing their investigations.

In the early 1980's a series of events took place that led to the formation of a system of fire investigation called the *team concept*. The system was designed to enable different agencies involved in an investigation to come to an agreement regarding the origin and cause of a fire. The *team concept* was formulated on four basic principles.

#### **Principles of the *Team Concept***

1. Everyone does their own job.
2. Everyone supports everyone else so everyone can do their job.
3. Everyone shares.
4. Everyone agrees.

These principles laid the foundation for procedures and agreements between the various agencies that have an interest in fire losses. This sort of co-operation helps manage how an investigation will proceed. The *team concept* also recognizes that, while a fire loss may hold different interests for different agencies, only one agency - the OFC - is mandated by legislation to take an interest in all fires.

Contrary to popular belief the *team concept* has no fixed rules - only the four guiding principles. The *team concept* is not law, nor are the principles forced upon jurisdictions<sup>4</sup>. There is no central agency responsible to ensure the *team concept* is put in place, is adhered to or is standardized through any form of province-wide agreement.

Each jurisdiction and agency is free to make their own rules and agreements concerning how they will work within the principles of the *team concept*. Different policies and agreements exist in different jurisdictions. Some jurisdictions decide not to use the *team concept* at all for fire investigation. Because municipal fire authorities hold both the duty and the authority to conduct fire investigations, they are free to follow whatever system of investigation management they choose. However, the OFC strongly promotes the *team concept* to all fire officials and authorities involved with fire investigation.

To meet the requirements of the *Act* the OFC follows a carefully considered set of guidelines when investigating fires. These guidelines not only fulfill the mandated roles and responsibilities

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<sup>4</sup> The term "jurisdiction" describes any municipal government organized under Saskatchewan legislation.

assigned to the OFC, but also take into consideration case law, other legislation that has a potential impact on fire investigation and use of the *team concept*.

Individual rights, as well as the interests and rights of other investigating agencies must be respected. It can be difficult to satisfy all of the concerned parties during an investigation while maintaining balance between the often-conflicting needs and desires of numerous agencies and individuals. At the same time, OFC investigators are clearly obligated to meet the requirements of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*. Occasionally, individuals and agencies are left feeling their concerns have not been adequately addressed during an investigation. The actions taken by OFC fire investigators are motivated by the need to ensure fires are properly investigated within the bounds of professional ethics and legislative requirements. Working co-operatively, using the principals of the *team concept*, results in far fewer misunderstandings about the role the OFC is obligated to play in fire investigations.

The OFC follows the principles of the *team concept*, but has no formal agreement with any agency establishing “rules” for investigation. Working closely with the other agencies involved in fire investigations has allowed the OFC to identify the interests and concerns of those agencies. OFC investigation policies have been established with a clear understanding of those concerns and interests. The *team concept* is the underlying principle of all OFC investigation policy.

The following presents details of the mandated roles and responsibilities of the OFC and how they relate to the principles of the *team concept*.

**Team Concept Principle 1: Everyone does their own job**

This principle recognizes that each agency involved in a fire investigation has a specific interest and specific expertise in the investigation of fires. Each member of the team contributes from their area of expertise and recognizes the contribution from other team members. These co-operative efforts come together to form a complete “picture” of the investigation that benefits the entire team. The principle is clear; no one individual can “do it all” and that a team approach is the best and most productive method for fire investigation.

*The Fire Prevention Act, 1992* is the only legislation that assigns the specific duty of fire investigation, and assigns it to a fire authority (the local assistant and/or the OFC). The OFC responds to help local assistants in an investigation, or because the fire holds specific interest due to the nature of the loss. During the investigation of a fire loss the origin, cause and circumstances of the loss are identified and reported by the local assistant and/or the OFC fire investigators.

- a) The Office of the Fire Commissioner has three specific duties under *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992* in regards to fire investigation.
  - i.) To collect and disseminate statistical information on fire losses.
  - ii.) To provide assistance, advisory and consulting services to local assistants.
  - iii.) To provide for the training of local assistants.

- b) The OFC has a discretionary mandate under *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*, to investigate certain fire losses.
- i.) Where injury or death has occurred.
  - ii.) When suspicious or criminal evidence is found.
  - iii.) When government buildings or properties are involved.
  - iv.) When a large loss <sup>5</sup> fire has occurred.
- c) **Section 16 – Investigation** of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992* mandates additional duties.
- 16(2)** *Where a provincial inspector, other than the fire commissioner, makes an investigation pursuant to subsection (1), the provincial inspector, immediately after the completion of the investigation, shall furnish a written report of all facts concerning the cause, origin and circumstances of the fire to the fire commissioner.*
- d) During an investigation the OFC fulfills its responsibility to determine the origin, cause and circumstances of the fire. (commonly referred to as “Determining OC&C”)
- i.) **Origin** is the exact or general location where the fire started.
  - ii.) **Cause** is the description of the fire ignition sequence, consisting of identifying up to 5 pieces of critical information.
    - The igniting object.
    - How the igniting object is powered/fuelled.
    - The material first ignited.
    - The mechanism of how the igniting object ignited the material first ignited.
    - The act or omission that resulted in the fire.
  - iii.) **Circumstances** normally consist of information detailing the sequence of events leading to the 5 items identified in “Cause” resulting in a fire.

The OFC does not investigate arson, insurance fraud or any other aspect of a fire loss - other than the factors that will allow for the identification of the origin, cause and circumstances of the fire. While the OFC has no mandate or responsibility to identify responsibility, motive or opportunity in relation to a fire, it can be called upon to provide advice or assistance in these matters by agencies whose job it is to identify these aspects.

Where the OFC determines circumstances that may be of interest to other agencies (arson, fraud, product liability, etc.) the OFC immediately notifies the responsible agencies and follows procedures to protect the integrity of the investigation to ensure that it is not compromised, for the OFC or any other agency.

In doing its job of determining origin, cause and circumstances, and by notifying appropriate agencies when it is determined they have a job to do as well, the OFC maintains the *team concept* principle of ***Everyone does their own job***. Concerning this principle, the OFC only asks

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<sup>5</sup> The impact a fire loss has on a community determines if it is classified as a “large loss.” One fire loss may have a greater impact than another, even though the dollar value of the two losses is the same. The economic and social impacts of a fire are considered when evaluating the loss and may have an effect beyond the immediate fire damage. All fires start small and regulations demand equipment and procedures are installed in place to offer reasonable assurance that fire suppression activities will be effective before a large loss occurs. Large loss fires demand investigation to determine why they became large losses.

for notification when a fire occurs so it may do its job - not to interfere with the work of other agencies.

**Team Concept Principle 2 - Everyone supports everyone else so everyone can do their job**

This principle is basic to any activity involving a team. It means support is given by and to every team member, or potential team member, in every aspect of the investigation. This principle supports the first principle of the *team concept*. It identifies that each member of the team not only brings specific expertise to the investigation, but that each team member has specific interests in the fire investigation and that these diverse interests must be served.

The involvement of the OFC in an investigation is guided by two key factors.

- The OFC will provide investigation assistance to any agency, provided the request falls within its areas of responsibility or interest.
- That legislative authority exists for the OFC to conduct an investigation.

***The OFC will provide investigation assistance to any agency, provided the request falls within its areas of responsibility or interest.***

The OFC receives numerous requests for assistance and responds to almost all of them. However, a number of requests are made because the investigating agency has failed to make a determination or disagrees with a determination of origin, cause and circumstances made by another agency. If the scene is compromised or OFC confidence in completing a valid investigation is low, the OFC will not usually respond. Origin, cause and circumstances are determined by investigation, not negotiation. Attempting to “re-investigate” a fire loss, particularly after other agencies have already disturbed the scene and interview those involved, is rarely successful.

Insurance representatives are welcome<sup>6</sup> on the fire scene and to be involved in the investigation, unless the property is under an order to restrict the property owner or other unauthorized persons from entering. Case law has identified that a closure order under *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*, which restricts the property owner from the property, must also restrict all other private persons from the scene. Depending on circumstances of the closure order, insurance personnel may be restricted from entering a fire scene during an investigation. This is to protect the OFC from any charge or challenge concerning the validity of an investigation. An insurance representative who is excluded because of a closure order will have the situation explained to them and they will still form a part of the investigation team, just not on the fire scene.

Police agencies have clearly identified that police interest in fires exists **only** where criminal activity has occurred and that they have neither interest nor the resources to be involved in the investigation of every fire in the province. OFC fire investigators welcome police on scene for any fire investigation, but police are not requested unless a death has occurred or until evidence of criminal activity is determined.

A fire investigation where evidence identifies the fire is of incendiary origin is immediately reported to police authorities. OFC policy clearly details the actions to be taken.

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<sup>6</sup> Normally insurance personnel are on a fire scene with the OFC as allowed under ***Section 13(1)(b) – Right of entry and examination*** of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*.

*“When an OFC Fire Investigator determines the probable cause involves incendiary fire cause, the Fire Investigator shall retain control of the fire scene and immediately inform the police, providing grounds for the belief that the fire’s cause was incendiary. The Fire Investigator will request that the police obtain consent or warrant to enter the premises for all fires where incendiary fire cause is suspected or determined before continuing the investigation.”*

Police may be taken onto the scene under the authority of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*<sup>7</sup>, so that the OFC investigator can provide sufficient information to allow the police officer to establish sufficient justification to apply for a warrant or gain consent to enter.

A fire scene with evidence of incendiary fire cause becomes the subject of a criminal investigation and an investigation by police may not be conducted or continued under the authority of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*. Nor may local assistants or OFC fire investigators conduct an investigation under the Criminal Code as their authority is identified only under the *Act*. Once a criminal investigation has begun police take the lead role. In these situations police authorities often request assistance from OFC Fire Investigators. A fire involving circumstances of interest to other agencies (such as Gas Safety or Occupational Health and Safety) that have identified their interests to the OFC are also notified when appropriate.

The OFC may restrict persons from entering a fire scene for a number of different reasons. Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) regulations require persons investigating a fire to be equipped with adequate safety clothing and equipment and to be adequately trained to ensure their safety. Persons entering a fire scene under the authority of the *Act* are required to comply with OH&S regulations. OFC staff will not condone unsafe activities on a fire scene and are obligated to report infractions of provincial regulations to the proper authority.

#### ***Authority exists for the OFC to conduct an investigation***

The authority of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*, is applicable under certain conditions.<sup>8</sup>

- a) If an investigation, by an authority designated under *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*, has started within 3 days of the fire’s occurrence.
- b) Until the origin, cause and circumstances of the fire are known.

If a local assistant or OFC Fire Investigator has not started a fire investigation within the 3 day requirement, entry to property must be under an authority other than *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*. The *Act* does not address alternate procedures for gaining entry, such as applying for a warrant or getting permission from the owner. Under these circumstances the person or agency requesting a response by the OFC must demonstrate they have authority to enter. Examples of this include the Criminal Code, the contractual terms of an insurance policy or legislated authorities given by other provincial acts.

Once the origin and cause of a fire is determined, the OFC no longer has any authority under *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*, for the investigation to continue. If an investigator under the *Act*

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<sup>7</sup> See **Section 13(1)(b) – Right of entry and examination** of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*.

<sup>8</sup> See **Section 15(3) and (4) – Investigation and report by local assistants** of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*.

determines an origin, cause and circumstance, the OFC can still assist other agencies in conducting their investigation, but it cannot do so under the authority of the *Act, 1992*.

A fire loss determined to involve suspicious or incendiary circumstances cannot be investigated under the authority of the *Act. The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*, is “administrative” legislation, designed to authorize the investigation of fires for the purposes of gathering statistical information about fire losses. An investigation for any purpose other than for the gathering of statistical information may not be conducted under the authority of the *Act*. The *Act* does identify<sup>9</sup> that “evidence” may be taken, but this is not specifically for the purposes of identifying criminal activity (i.e. arson or fraud). Evidence may be taken for “testing” related to fire cause or to identify product failure, as described in the *Act*. Evidence for criminal activity may only be taken by a police officer under the rules and procedures established in the Criminal Code.

OFC policy and procedures require staff to support the investigation of other agencies. This is done by contacting or notifying the appropriate agency, assisting other agencies in conducting their investigation (within the OFC mandate and responsibilities) and by sharing information from the OFC investigation. This way the *team concept* principle of ***Everyone supports everyone else so everyone can do their job*** is supported by the OFC.

The OFC **will not** compromise an investigation by working outside of accepted legal, professional or ethical boundaries.

### **Team Concept Principle 3 - Everyone shares**

The principle of sharing is primarily related to information regarding a fire loss and the resources necessary to advance fire investigation training.

#### ***Information Sharing***

At a fire scene, OFC investigators provide information they have gained from their investigation with all other investigation agency personnel present at the scene. This information is usually shared verbally, as each agency is on-site conducting their aspect of the investigation.

Any person requesting information from the OFC about the origin, cause and circumstances surrounding a fire is provided with that information, once the fire investigation is concluded. The release of information is part of the mandate of the OFC. But, the information released is limited to those areas specified in the *Act*. That means the origin, cause and circumstances of a fire. Other information held by, or reported to, the OFC is not released.

The OFC does not share internal reports, except in unusual circumstances. This policy was implemented after numerous incidents where OFC reports were distributed to third parties without permission. Internal OFC reports were passed to the media and presented in court as evidence. It was also discovered that persons were providing testimony in court based on an OFC report provided to them, again without permission. An unwritten part of the ***Everyone shares*** principle of the *team concept* is that sharing is not done with third parties without mutual consent of all team members. The only time the OFC will provide an internal report to another agency is where it is necessary to support an investigation by that agency (i.e. to the RCMP).

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<sup>9</sup> See ***Section 13(1)(e) - Right of entry and examination*** of *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*.

The OFC does not release reports received from other agencies. The OFC receives reports, in confidence, from other agencies (fire, police and insurance) as part of the OFC mandate to collect and disseminate information about fires. In order to meet its mandate, as well as follow the principles of the *team concept*, third party requests for reports are directed to the agency where the report originated.

The first two principles of the *team concept* recognize individual agency expertise and interests. When expertise from a particular agency can not be brought to the scene, and that agency still has a valid interest in the fire loss, the OFC serves those interest by sharing information.

### ***Training***

The OFC conducts training programs for fire service personnel and insurance personnel in fire loss reporting. The OFC programs are designed to increase and improve both the quantity and quality of fire loss statistics.

Training in fire investigation techniques is normally offered to those personnel the OFC has a mandate to train. Training is also provided to specific “partner” agencies such as the RCMP and Insurance Crime Prevention Bureau. The OFC supports training for other agencies (i.e. insurance personnel) through associations like the Saskatchewan Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators.

The OFC is the only authority accredited to provide certification to fire service personnel as fire investigators in Saskatchewan. A high standard for the qualification of fire investigators is maintained through training programs conducted by the OFC. The OFC provides internationally recognized certification through the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC). IFSAC is a world-recognized fire service certification organization. The OFC is the agency accredited in Saskatchewan to test and certify fire service personnel to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) professional standards. Certification is available to fire service personnel who are able to demonstrate they have acquired the knowledge and skills required by the NFPA standard. Only fire personnel may receive IFSAC certification. Personnel from non-fire agencies are invited to attend certification training offered by the OFC and receive provincial recognition as a fire investigator.

### **Team Concept Principle 4 - Everyone agrees**

The primary purpose of the *Team concept* is to assist all agencies involved in a fire investigation to come to the same conclusion about the fire. Each agency is entitled to their opinion and to substantiate that opinion. Where agreement is not possible, the agencies are free to “agree to disagree.” This is a valid conclusion under the principles of the *team concept*. The second aspect of the ***Everyone agrees*** principle, is that everyone agrees to follow all the principles of the *team concept* in the best possible team spirit.

The OFC will “call” any fire investigated based upon information gained during the investigation and within the areas of responsibility of the OFC. Any person who does not agree with the OFC Fire Investigator’s conclusion is free to do so, and are welcome to present an opinion for consideration by the OFC. As mentioned, fire cause is determined by investigation - not negotiation - but all hypotheses will be considered.



### ***The Fire Investigation System***

Appendix A is a chart showing a logical system for investigation supporting the *team concept*. This system has been virtually unchanged since 1916 and is described by *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*. Local assistants should keep three key aspects of the investigation system in mind.

- The requirements investigate and report all fire losses..
- The need to identify certain fires of interest to the OFC within a 24-hour period.
- That assistance is available from the OFC at any time during an investigation.

Police and insurance personnel should contact either the local assistant in the jurisdiction where the fire occurred or follow the decision path, from the “INVESTIGATION STARTED” box, on the chart in Appendix A, if they are not already involved in the investigation. Police and insurance personnel having difficulty contacting the local assistant, or gaining assistance, regarding a fire loss should contact the OFC at **1-800-739-3473**.

A local assistant is required to contact the OFC, as indicated at number ① on the decision path chart, when the fire involves circumstances that are listed within the “FIRE OF INTEREST” box on the chart. Because it is accepted that a local assistant may not be involved in the investigation of all fires, police and insurance personnel are asked to contact the OFC at this point as well.

The local assistant, police or insurance representatives may contact the OFC at anytime during an investigation to gain assistance. Number ② on the chart indicates the point when the OFC should be contacted in an investigation where an origin, cause and circumstance have not been determined and assistance is required.

### ***OFC Investigations***

The OFC will contact insurance company representatives at the earliest possible point during a fire investigation. This is necessary because insurance loss information is required as part of the statistical information the OFC is mandated to gather for fire loss reports. In the majority of fire investigations conducted by the OFC, the owner may know that they are insured but often do not know the insurance company (they usually know their broker’s name). The OFC typically has the owner contact their insurance representative directly. This may result in some delay in notification of the insurance investigator, but the owner is a usual required to contact the insurer directly as a condition of the policy.

Police are contacted when evidence indicating an incendiary fire cause is found, when there are indications of other criminal activity or when a death has occurred. The OFC has training programs in place including a “mentoring program” to allow personnel involved in OFC training to gain experience. Individuals involved with this program are not contacted in their official capacity with the agency they represent, but as part of their on-going training. Individuals in the mentoring program may have statutory obligations to their agency that effect activities on the fire scene. These issues are addressed on a case-by-case basis to avoid any conflict of interest.

The term “suspicious” is not a valid description for the purpose of fire reporting. Suspicion also plays no part in an investigation, beyond alerting investigators to take additional precautions to preserve the validity and integrity of both the fire scene and the investigation. A normal

precaution taken for “suspicious” fires is to restrict entry to the property and involve the police right away. Most “suspicious” fires reported to the OFC, however, turn out to be accidental.

A fire death is always reported to police, if they are not already on-scene. The progress of an investigation is not delayed waiting for police to arrive, as long as no other immediate reasons to delay the investigation are evident. Under legislative precedence the only reason to delay an OFC investigation is if a higher priority investigation (i.e. under the Criminal Code) must clearly take place first.

### ***Forming a Team using the Team Concept***

The *team concept* recognizes that there is a need for an increasing number of agencies to become involved in a fire investigation, as circumstances dictate. The declared interest each agency has in the investigation dictates when a team should be formed and which agencies should be members.

The OFC is a member of the team where the local assistant is not available - or requires investigation assistance - and for fires that hold a special interest for the OFC. Once an OFC investigator is a member of the team, they may bring additional members onto the team, as interest or need is identified.

Where the *team concept* is in place – and the OFC becomes part of the investigation – the OFC investigators work under the authority of the local fire official requesting assistance. Local application of the *team concept* is not changed by OFC presence at the scene.

In approximately 86% of all fires, an insurance representative forms part of the team. Not all property suffering a loss from fire is insured. Insurance reports account for 37%<sup>10</sup> of all fire reports received by the OFC. This statistic suggests that the majority of insurance companies in Saskatchewan have limited interest in fire investigations and that they rely on the local assistant, or other investigation agencies, to investigate and report fire losses. The OFC must often contact the insurance industry for loss report information, but insurance involvement in investigations is not compulsory. Insurance representatives are welcome on-scene unless there is some reason they are not permitted, for example, when a closure order has been issued for the fire scene.

In approximately 9% of fires, police are a necessary part of the investigation team. In these situations police become the lead agency because the investigation cannot be conducted under *The Fire Prevention Act, 1992*. Incendiary fires and fires where a death occurs account for a very small percentage of reported fires in Saskatchewan. Although specific information on police involvement is not recorded by the OFC, statistics indicate that police were notified in all cases where the fire held an identified police interest - for example where a death occurred or the fire cause was incendiary. Police are usually not requested on-scene until evidence of incendiary fire cause is determined or when OFC policy requires police be notified immediately. Police are welcome on scene unless there is some reason to limit their access - usually when safety concerns, such as the need to wear SCBA, are identified.

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<sup>10</sup> The majority of reports from insurance sources are received from SGI - Saskatchewan Government Insurance.

Gas or electrical safety personnel are sometimes requested as team members by the OFC. The requirement for these personnel may be more frequent in some jurisdictions, but information gathered by the OFC identifies that about 1 fire per year occurs where Gas Safety has an interest, and 4 others occur where one of these two agencies are asked to take part. In the majority of fires investigated by the OFC, Gas and electrical safety personnel are either not required or independent experts are engaged. The gas and electrical safety agencies have stated they should only be called when absolutely necessary, as their resources are limited. The OFC has complied with these requests and has taken steps to use other experts where possible.

Insurance and police may expand the team at any time by. Police identification technicians, independent insurance investigators and representatives of Saskatchewan Occupational Health and Safety are just a few examples of the outside expertise which might be called on. However, OFC policy does not require a team to be formed until point ③ on the decision path chart is reached in the investigation. Even then, only those agencies needed are asked to assist. The only other point in the decision process where a team might be formed is where the OFC requires assistance in determining or confirming OC&C, and then only those agencies necessary to assist are contacted.

Other team members may be required, but for the majority of fires investigated where the OFC is on-scene, the local assistant, insurance and police make up the team, with either the local assistant or police as the lead agency.

### **Conclusion**

The *team concept* is based upon guiding principles – not rules. If “rules” exist for the *team concept*, they are those that have been agreed upon between agencies or are part of an individual agency’s policy and procedures.

Use of the principles of the *team concept* are recommended and encouraged - not legislated or forced upon a jurisdiction or agency. The authority for fire investigation in a jurisdiction is free to follow any system of investigation management they feel meets their needs. Agencies who do not agree with the system of investigation in a jurisdiction are free to negotiate any agreement they feel is necessary with that jurisdiction. The OFC does not have the authority, duty or desire to require any jurisdiction or agency follow the principles of the *team concept*.

The Office of the Fire Commissioner follows the principals of the *team concept* when conducting investigations. Agencies that have stated their interest - and identified when and how to contact them for fire investigations - are contacted by the OFC at the appropriate time. The OFC conducts fire investigations within its defined mandate and identified roles and responsibilities.

- Collect and disseminate statistical information on fire losses.
- Provide assistance, advisory and consulting services to local assistants.
- Provide for the training of local assistants.
- Support a more independent local fire services delivery structure.

Implementation of the principles of the *team concept* provides all agencies involved in the investigation of fire losses with a number of substantial benefits. Access to expertise from other agencies, being able to efficiently and effectively investigate any fire and the ability to conduct investigations under difficult or challenging conditions are just some of the advantages partnerships under the *team concept* provide. Success relies on every participating agency believing in, committing to and following through with the principles of the *team concept*.

**APPENDIX A**

