

GENERAL ORDER



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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Title	
Handling Fire/EMS Incidents	
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Rescinds/Replaces	
General Order 308.8 (Negligent Fires), and General Order 308.11 (Responsibilities at the Scene of a Fire and the Security of Fire Department Personnel and Equipment), Special Order 81-30 (MPD Security at Fire Scenes), Special Order 98-22 (Fire Department Arson Investigation Authority), Special Order 96-16 (Ambulance Escorts)	

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I. BACKGROUND

Members of the Metropolitan Police Department respond frequently to calls with, or at the request of District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services (Fire/EMS) personnel. Although the respective mission of each agency is different, procedures must govern the activities of each entity to ensure a coordinated and effective effort at the scene of Fire/EMS incidents.

On-scene activities that result in a less-than-professional and cooperative effort during mutual response can endanger law enforcement and fire/rescue operations, victims, emergency personnel, and have an extremely negative impact on public relations. This directive establishes safety procedures to be followed by members of the department when responding to scenes to assist Fire/EMS personnel.

II. POLICY

The policy of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) is to provide assistance to Fire/EMS personnel in their effort to provide emergency medical services and protect life and property.

III. DEFINITION

When used in this directive, the following terms shall have the meaning designated:

1. Prima Facie - evidence that would at first sight, if uncontested, establish a fact or raise a presumption of fact.

2. Arson and Explosives Task Force - consists of members of the Metropolitan Police Department (Detectives, Special Investigations Branch [SIB]), Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), and the District of Columbia Fire and EMS Department (Arson Investigators, Fire Investigations Unit) responsible for investigating arsons, suspicious fires, criminal explosions, and assisting Violent Crimes Branch with death investigations resulting from fires.

IV. REGULATIONS

D.C. Official Code § 5-417.01 (Fire and Arson Investigation-Authority Generally; Authority to Enter and Examine; Arrest and Warrant Power) authorizes the D.C. Fire Department, through qualified members of its Arson Investigation Unit, to investigate suspicious fires in the District of Columbia. The D.C. Official Code provides authority to:

1. “The Fire Chief, Fire Marshal, and his authorized representative to investigate the cause, origin, and circumstances of every fire, explosion, or hazardous materials emergency in which the Fire Department has a reasonable interest.”
2. “The Fire Marshal and such other personnel, designated in writing by the Fire Chief, the same general police powers, to include arrest powers, as members of the MPD for the purpose of enforcing the fire safety laws in effect in the District of Columbia.” (CALEA 42.1.4)

Note: An identification folder signed jointly by the Fire Chief and the Chief of Police will identify Fire Department investigators.

3. “Fire officials to take custody of, and safeguard, all related evidence and prohibit disturbance or removal of anything, upon the involved property or adjacent property, until the investigation is complete when there is reason to believe such an incident may be the result of a violation of law.”
4. “The Fire Marshal and designated arson investigators to carry a firearm, in the course of official duties, when so designated in writing by the Fire Chief.”

Note: The Fire Marshal and designated arson investigators are required to complete a course of training, in the safe handling of firearms and the use of deadly force, and be qualified to use a firearm according to the standards applicable to officers of the Metropolitan Police Department. The Chief of Police may, in his/her discretion, issue firearm registration certificates to the Fire Marshal and members of the Fire and Arson Investigation Unit.

5. The Metropolitan Police Department is the primary investigative agency in fires, explosions, and hazardous materials incidents involving critical injury, death, assaults with intent to kill, or domestic violence. (CALEA 42.1.4)

V. PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

A. When responding to a Fire/EMS incident, members shall:

1. Respond promptly to the scene of all fires to which they are dispatched or observe while on patrol.
2. If arriving prior to firefighters or rescue workers, quickly assess the scene to determine:
 - a. What has happened;
 - b. The number of people injured/trapped; and
 - c. The extent of injuries.
3. When requested by a Fire/EMS official, or as needed, assist with the activities of Fire/EMS personnel.

Note: When a Fire/EMS official or MPDC official is at the scene of a fire, members shall be guided by the official's directive regarding appropriate actions to be taken, to include evacuation of the premises and points of egress.

4. Clear the immediate area and prevent interference by pedestrians and traffic.

Note: Wear reflective clothing at all times when directing or controlling traffic, regardless of the weather or time of day; and (CALEA 61.3.2.g)

5. Prevent persons from crowding near entrances to burning buildings.
6. Notify an on scene MPD/Fire official or the Public Safety Communications Center (PSCC) dispatcher prior to entering and upon exiting a burning building.
7. Notify the PSCC dispatcher upon completion of the above-mentioned duties. (CALEA 41.2.5)

8. If contemplating extinguishing or suppressing the fire with an MPD fire extinguisher, ensure that the fire extinguisher is compatible for use with the material burning (some fire extinguishers are ineffective on certain types of fires).
9. Notify the Mobile Crime Unit, via the PSCC dispatcher, to respond and assist in the documentation (e.g. photos and diagrams) of arson cases involving:
 - a. Homicides; and
 - b. Serial arsons.
10. Keep all persons except Fire/EMS personnel out of the building until the occupant has resumed possession, except:
 - a. Persons bearing fire actuary passes; or
 - b. Employees of the gas or electric company in connection with their official duties.

Note: If identified by properly displayed current press passes, members of the press may operate within fire lines, not to include the actual premises. (CALEA 54.1.3.a)

- B. As a result of past violent incidents directed at Fire/EMS personnel, members shall provide the following safety enhancements:
 1. A marked four-wheel vehicular escort for a D.C. Fire/EMS ambulance in the following situations: (CALEA 61.3.3.a)
 - a. Whenever it is believed that the subject to be transported to the hospital may be the victim of a violent crime, especially drug- and/or gang-related crimes;
 - b. When an ambulance crew or the ranking Fire/EMS official at a medical emergency scene requests an escort; or
 - c. When it is deemed necessary by an official of MPD.
 2. When a police escort of an ambulance is warranted, an official shall immediately assign a marked unit to escort the D.C. Fire/EMS ambulance to the hospital. (CALEA 61.3.3.a)
 3. An officer shall be assigned to ride in the ambulance, if:
 - a. The subject to be transported is combative; and (CALEA 71.3.2)

- b. The ambulance crew or ranking Fire/EMS official makes a request. (CALEA 71.3.1)

Note: The officer shall determine the means by which the subject is restrained, based upon the subject's behavior (e.g. whether the subject is under arrest or the subject is being transported for a psychiatric evaluation). (CALEA 17.3.2)

4. Prior to leaving the scene of the incident, the escort unit shall consult with the ambulance crew to determine:

- a. The route of travel; and
- b. Approximate speed to be used on the trip to the hospital.

Note: The Fire/EMS dispatcher will notify the destination hospital that a police escorted ambulance is in transit to that location.

5. The escort unit shall notify the PSCC: (CALEA 61.3.3.a / 71.3.1)

- a. Of the time the ambulance and escort leave the scene;
- b. The location of the destination hospital; and
- c. Of the arrival at the destination hospital.

6. The escort unit shall follow the transporting ambulance and operate as a Code-1 secondary unit, with emergency lights and siren (yelp position) activated. The escort unit shall: (CALEA 61.3.3.a / 71.3.1)

- a. Govern its speed by, and not exceed, the speed of the ambulance; (CALEA 61.3.3.a / 71.3.1)
- b. Maintain a safe distance between the two vehicles; and
- c. Remain close enough to provide immediate assistance if required.

7. Upon arrival at the hospital, the escort unit shall:

- a. Ensure that no suspicious persons are in close proximity to the ambulance and/or the emergency room entrance; (CALEA 61.3.3.a / 71.3.2)

- b. Notify the hospital security officers of the transported subject's arrival and that the subject may be the victim of a violent crime; and
 - c. Request that a security officer respond to the emergency room.
 8. Upon arrival of a hospital security officer at the emergency room, the escort unit shall:
 - a. Determine that no apparent threat exists to the safety of the victim or ambulance crew;
 - b. Advise the PSCC dispatcher that the escort detail is terminated; and
 - c. Return to his/her regular patrol assignment by the most direct route. (CALEA 61.3.3.a)
 9. When the hospital destination is located outside the confines of the police district in which the incident occurred, the PSCC dispatcher shall notify the appropriate district Watch Commander that a victim is being transported, by ambulance, to a hospital within the district, assisted by a MPD escort. (CALEA 61.3.3.a)
 10. When a PD Form 251 (Event Report) is prepared, the narrative section shall indicate the scout car/cruiser number of the escort unit and the name of the MPD official authorizing the escort or Fire/EMS official requesting the escort. Situations where the subject to be transported to the hospital may be the victim of a violent crime shall also be documented in the narrative of the PD Form 251.(CALEA 61.3.3.a)
 11. In those instances when the transport will terminate at a hospital destination outside the District of Columbia, the MPD escort shall terminate at the District of Columbia boundary, and shall return to its regular assignment by the most direct route. (CALEA 61.3.3.a)

Note: Should an escort be required beyond the District, the Fire/EMS dispatcher is responsible for contacting the appropriate jurisdiction for assistance.

C. Reporting Procedures

1. A PD Form 251 shall be prepared, by the first responding officer, in the following circumstances:
 - a. Arson, as determined by the Fire Investigator on the scene (to include a PD Form 252, Supplemental Report);

- b. Suspicious fires, as determined by the Fire Investigator on the scene;
- c. Fires resulting in injuries or death; or
- d. Fires that yield found property. (CALEA 82.2.1.a-b).

Note: Names of fire fighters injured or fatally injured in fires shall be included in all PD Form 251's.

- 2. For cases in which the reporting officer's preliminary investigation, in consultation with the on-scene official, indicates that a fire is of a suspicious origin, notify the Arson and Explosives Task Force, Special Investigations Branch, through the PSCC dispatcher, to assume responsibility for the case.

Note: Ensure that the name of the person notified is included in the PD Form 251.

- 3. In fires that result in an injury or death, members shall notify:
 - a. The Arson and Explosives Task Force; and
 - b. The Violent Crimes Branch, Office of the Superintendent of Detectives.
- 4. With the exception of those instances set forth, members shall not be required to prepare an official report on the facts and circumstances surrounding every fire. All pertinent information regarding the fire shall be recorded, on a PD Form 258-A (Radio Administrative Card) or PD Form 258-B (Radio Event Card) whichever is applicable, by the PSCC dispatcher.
- 5. With the exception of circumstances outlined in Part V.C.1, the responding unit shall return to service with the disposition "Report Handled by the Fire Department," once:
 - a. The fire scene has been secured;
 - b. Traffic is cleared; and
 - c. Conditions are returned to normal.

D. Officials shall ensure:

- 1. Members are assigned to facilitate the movement of traffic, prevent persons from endangering their lives, and secure property; (CALEA 61.3.2.c)

2. Adequate police security to maintain and protect all potential crime scenes, until such time it is determined by the responding fire investigators, that assisting police personnel are no longer needed; and
3. Additional MPD units are assigned to patrol areas known for hostilities or disorders, such as assaults on Fire/EMS personnel, when requested by a Fire/EMS official. (CALEA 42.2.2.c)

VI. CROSS REFERENCE

1. District of Columbia Municipal Regulations Title 6A (Police Personnel) Chapter 2 § 200.20
2. District of Columbia Official Code § 5-417.01 (Fire and Arson Investigation-Authority Generally; Authority to Enter and Examine; Arrest and Warrant Power)

// SIGNED //
Charles H. Ramsey
Chief of Police

CHR:NMJ:MAR:mcw