

SANTA CLARA POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER 41.5

FIRES

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41.5.1 Reporting a Fire

The reporting of a fire is similar to the reporting of any other emergency. With rare exception, the report should be made prior to any mitigating action(s) taken by the officer. Radio is the notification method of choice.

Report information should contain a brief description of what is burning. Other related information may be appropriate based on circumstances. This may include reference to exposures, immediate rescue required, hazardous materials involved, etc. Generally, clear text is most appropriate for making the report since any miscommunication may result in the wrong type of Fire Department apparatus being dispatched.

41.5.2 Alarm and Sprinkler Systems

Buildings equipped with fire sprinkler systems will have an exterior fire alarm bell. This bell, when sounding, indicates that the sprinkler system is flowing water. Again, the officer should report the alarm prior to any investigating. The officer should be aware that some burglar systems might have a similar type alarm bell, although there is usually some type of identification on the bell housing.

The police officer should not take steps to silence a fire alarm, except to assist the Fire Department if needed.

41.5.3 Protecting Life and Property

Officers that are first arrivals at an emergency incident must make reporting (or confirmation thereof) their first act. Protection of life (rescue) will immediately follow. Officers must exercise their best judgment when determining what rescue efforts to undertake. If the decision is made to enter a hazardous area (burning building, area excluded from view, etc.), Communications should be notified prior to entry so that incoming units (both Police and Fire) can account for personnel.

Officers should assist in notifying occupants of evacuation when circumstances require (such as multi-occupancy buildings, building where persons may be sleeping, potential fire spread areas).

41.5.4 Preventing Interference with Fire Operations

Ordinarily the primary responsibility of the Police Department at a fire is prevention of interference with work of the Fire Department. Such interference arises from vehicular traffic in most cases, but may be caused by pedestrians and crowds, particularly in the case of large fires. In deciding whether to establish an area blockade and, if so, to what extent, officers must be governed by the circumstances of each fire, including such factors as the extent of the fire, the present or potential

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congestion of the area from vehicles and persons, the number of fire-fighting apparatus now and potentially at the scene, and the manner in which fire hose is or will be laid.

No vehicular traffic should be allowed within the block in which the fire is located, or beyond that if such traffic would in any way hinder the fighting of the fire or crossing of fire hose. Under no circumstances must the Police Officer interfere with the regular or voluntary firefighters reaching the scene of the fire.

Officers shall be governed in this respect by the California Vehicle Code, Section 21707, which states: "No motor vehicles, except an authorized emergency vehicle or a vehicle of a duly authorized member of a fire or police department, shall be operated within the block wherein an emergency situation responded to by any fire department vehicle exists, except that in the event the nearest intersection to such emergency is more than 300 feet therefrom, this section shall prohibit operation of vehicles only within 300 feet of the emergency, unless directed to do so by a member of the fire department or police department. The emergency shall be defined to have ceased to exist when the official of the fire department in charge at the scene of the emergency shall so indicate. Officials of the fire department or police department shall make every effort to prevent the closing off entirely of congested highway traffic passing the scene of any such emergency."

41.5.5 Driving Over Fire Hoses

Officers shall be governed in this respect by Section 21708 of the California Vehicle Code which states: "No person shall drive or propel any vehicle or conveyance upon, over or across, or in any manner damage any fire hose or chemical hose used by or under the supervision and control of any organized fire department in the State of California. However, any vehicle may cross such hose provided suitable jumpers or other appliances are installed to protect such hose."

In the event a blockade of the fire area is necessary, traffic will be diverted at such intersections and in such a manner as to allow a minimum of congestion within the immediate or nearby areas.

Where a blockade of the fire area is necessary, sufficient personnel shall be assigned to allow for complete coverage. The officers first at the scene shall make a preliminary survey and request whatever additional assistance may be necessary.

At fires of long duration, steps should be taken to barricade the area making use of street barricades, rope, etc., in a manner that will serve to protect the area and yet allow for more efficient distribution of personnel. Additional street barricades can be obtained from the Corporation Yard, Walsh Avenue, during the daytime. Rope can be obtained from the Commanding Officer in charge of any fire.

Fire lines should be established around the immediate vicinity of the fire as may be needed to prevent spectators from approaching too close to the scene of the fire and who will either be a source of interference or who may be injured. Police should take any precautions necessary where spectators are hindering fire-fighting operations.

The circumstances of each fire will determine the methods to be used in establishing such fire lines.

41.5.6 Investigation of Fires

All fires are investigated for their origin and cause. The possibility always exists for the fire to be incendiary. In fact, an incendiary fire might not be established for several days. Therefore, it becomes incumbent on the officer to treat the incident as a potential crime, and the burned area (and periphery) as a crime scene.

Both Police and Fire Department have personnel available for fire investigation. Either department may initiate their response. If an officer feels that a Fire Department investigator is needed, a request should be made to the Fire Official in charge at the scene (Incident Commander), who will properly route it. A Police arson investigator may be requested per standard operating procedures.

Officers may be required to assist the fire investigator, but should always be aware of potential witness/suspect activity.

If possible, it is of extreme value to have photographs of the fire scene in its incipient stages. Should an officer have photographic equipment available, a few pictures of the fire and of the surrounding area are appropriate. Bystanders should be photographed also, even if identification isn't feasible.

It should be pointed out that arson is often committed to cover up other crimes, such as burglary, theft, homicide, and "paper" crimes like embezzlement. More common though, is insurance fraud (especially vehicles). Since this usually involves much forethought, the arson is carefully thought out and may be extremely difficult to detect, even by trained arson investigators.

Also note that from a fire damage standpoint, slight charring is enough to constitute burning for the purpose of making an arrest pursuant to 451 or 452 P.C.

41.5.7 Supervision of Police Activity at Scene of Fire

Field Sergeants shall supervise all police activity at the scene of any major fire (2nd alarm) or where an assignment of additional officers is required. Sergeants shall notify their commanding officer of any serious fire.