



*Monterey County Fire Investigators Association
Monterey County, Ca.*

Date: January 7, 2006

To: Harald Kelley, Fire Chief
President, Monterey County Fire Chiefs Association

From: Daniel Gearhart, Battalion Chief
President, Monterey County Fire Investigators Association

Subject: 2005 Annual Report

Outlined in this report you will find the accomplishments and highlights for the Monterey County Fire Investigators Association for 2005.

Membership:

We ended the year with a total of 22 active members representing 10 different public safety agencies. Membership is divided into three categories; active member, associate member, and honorary member.

Active members are from public safety agencies who primary duties include the investigation of fires and explosions, or the investigation of criminal acts. Active members must be designated in writing by the head of the public safety organization for which they are employed.

Associate membership is open to representatives of private sector industries or organizations who can contribute to the effectiveness of the Association.

Honorary members are open to any person who is elected by the active membership to receive such honor.

Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force:

With the revision of our by-laws in 2005, the Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force was established as a subsidiary organization within in the Association. Members assigned to the MCFATF are placed on the "Fire Investigator Rotational Call-Out List" and are available for call-out throughout Monterey County. For designation on the Rotational Call-Out List, members must have obtained Fire Investigation 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B, PC 832, at least one years experience in their agency assigned as an Investigator, and approval from the head of their agency.

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We currently have 11 Investigators, and 1 Investigator Trainee, on the Rotational Call-Out List representing 7 different fire service agencies. During the calendar year 2005, we had 10 official requests for a Call-Out Investigator. Those requests are outlined below:

1. January 6, 2005 – Structure Fire – 41 Del Rey Circle, Salinas, 0159 hrs.
Requesting Agency: Salinas FD
Single family dwelling fire with total loss. Determined area of origin and turned over to Salinas FD.
Assigned Investigator: Pilotte / Kaminkar
2. February 5, 2005 – Structure Fire – 310 Corral De Tierra Road, 2330 hrs.
Requesting Agency: Salinas Rural FPD
Single family dwelling fire with one adult fatality. Cause determined to be accidental.
Assigned Investigator: Williams / Gearhart
3. June 25, 2005 – Vehicle Fire – 2680, 2590 El Camino Real, Prunedale, 1436 hrs.
Requesting Agency: North County FPD
Multiple vehicle fires. Cause determined to be arson.
Assigned Investigator: Williams
4. August 1, 2005 – Structure Fire – 775 La Purisma, Soledad, 1547 hrs.
Requesting Agency: Soledad FD
Single family dwelling structure fire. Cause determined to be a child playing with a lighter.
Assigned Investigator: Gearhart
5. August 10, 2005 – Vehicle Fire – 311 10th. Street, Greenfield, 0337 hrs.
Requesting Agency: Greenfield FD
Multiple vehicle fires that cause damage to residential structure. Cause determined to be arson.
Assigned Investigator: Roberson
6. August 12, 2005 – Vegetation Fire – Los Laurless Grade, Carmel Valley, 2200 hrs.
Requesting Agency: CDF
Small amount of vegetation burned with incendiary device. Cause determined to be arson.
Assigned Investigator: Urquides

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7. August 28, 2005 – Vehicle Fire – Bryan Canyon, Soledad, 0359 hrs.
Requesting Agency: Soledad FD
Vehicle fire in rural area. Cause determined to be arson.
Assigned Investigator: Williams

8. October 31, 2005 – Vegetation Fire – San Juan Grade Road, Salinas, 2243 hrs.
Requesting Agency: CDF
Vegetation fire off side of road. Cause determined to be arson.
Assigned Investigator: Gearhart

9. November 14, 2005 – Structure Fire – 1251 Palm, Soledad, 1000 hrs.
Requesting Agency: Soledad FD
Single family dwelling structure fire. Cause determined to be accidental.
Assigned Investigator: Leist

10. December 4, 2005 – Structure Fire – King City High School, 720 Broadway, King City. 2357 hrs.
Requesting Agency: King City FD
Fire to interior of portable classroom. Cause determined to be accidental.
Assigned Investigator: Gearhart

By-Laws Update:

During 2005, the organization's by-laws were updated that includes changing the name of the group from the "Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force" to the "Monterey County Fire Investigator's Association." This name change more reflects the overall nature of the organization and standardizes the name with the other Monterey County fire service organizations such as the Training Officer's Association and the Prevention Officer's Association.

Along with the name change, we established a standing committee titled the "Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force" with an appointed "Director" of the committee. This keeps the integrity of the "Task Force" intact along with maintaining the Rotational Call-Out List without an interruption.

The by-laws update also included establishing policy attachments that addresses associate membership, adjournment, and attendance requirements.

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Fireworks:

Prior to the start of “safe and sane” fireworks sales, the MCFIA developed a poster indicating the areas where fireworks were not allowed. The posters were distributed to all jurisdictions that allow the sale of “safe and sane” fireworks for posting on the fireworks stands.

During the fireworks season, several jurisdictions reported incidents of persons receiving, or attempting to receive dangerous fireworks shipped from out of state. Local investigators were able to intercept several of these shipments and the appropriate action was being taken. Local Investigators are working with the CDF – Arson / Bomb Division with these investigations. Several jurisdictions reported confiscating large amounts of dangerous fireworks along with citations and arrests during the fireworks season.

Shortly after July 4th, The MCFIA coordinated a fireworks disposal drop-off with the State Fire Marshals Office. Approximately 30 boxes of confiscated fireworks from Monterey County were turned over to a representative from the State Fire Marshals Office at a pre-arranged location.

Fireworks Legislation:

On January 5, 2005, the President of the Monterey County Fire Investigators Association was invited to attend the Safe & Sane Fireworks Advisory Committee meeting at the State Fire Marshal’s Office in Sacramento. The President attended the meeting and made a presentation to the committee recommending that the State Fire Marshals Office impose a statewide ban on whistling type fountains. This recommendation was based on the increased illegal use of whistling including the making of bottle bombs and pipe bombs. The committee took the recommendation under consideration and agreed to conduct further study and collect data on the request.

Fire Investigation Support Trailer:

Through the FY 2004 Department of Homeland Security Grant Program, the MCFIA was able to purchase a trailer that would be used to carry supplies and equipment in the event a fire or arson investigation needed additional support. During 2005, the trailer was equipped with supplies and equipment and is now available to members of the Task Force as needed. Thanks needs to be given to personnel from the Salinas Rural Fire Protection District for their efforts in getting the trailer in service during this past year and agreeing to house the trailer.

Juvenile Fire Setters Workshop:

On April 1, 2005, the MCFIA, along with the Central Coast Roundtable of the California Conference of Arson Investigators, co-sponsored a Juvenile Firesetters Workshop at the Seaside Highlands Community Center. There were 35 students who attended the workshop from throughout California. The instructors for the class were Kathryn Hooper from the Henderson, Nevada Fire Department and Virginia Hardman from Leadership Builders of Southern Nevada. Since the offering of the class, there has been some interest from several attendees of the class to formulate a countywide Youth Firesetter Intervention Program. This concept is currently in the discussion phase with the goal to establish a countywide Youth Firesetter Intervention Program in the near future.

“Change Your Clock – Change Your Battery”:

Prior to the end of daylight saving time, a press release was sent to the Monterey County media urging residents to change the batteries in their smoke detectors on the same day they change their clocks ending daylight savings time. The “Change Your Clock – Change Your Battery” is a national campaign sponsored by Energizer Batteries and the International Association of Fire Chiefs. In addition to the press release, 1000 batteries were requested from Energizer Battery in response to their free battery give away program for distribution in Monterey County. Unfortunately, our request was not fulfilled.

California Cigarette Fire Safety and Firefighter Protection Act:

On October 7, 2005, the Governor signed into law AB178, the California Cigarette Fire Safety and Firefighter Protection Act. This bill would require that cigarettes sold in California meet strict standards that would not allow a majority of the cigarettes sold in California to achieve a full length burn. California is only the third State in the nation to have such legislation. An attached legislative update from CCAI describes the legislation in more detail.

Fire Investigator Training:

In December 2005, the MCFIA requested \$15,277 in funding through the local Grant Approval Authority of the Department of Homeland Security Grant Program for local Investigator training in fire and arson investigation techniques. The proposed grant money would be used for costs associated with attending the 2006 winter and summer training seminars of the California Conference of Arson Investigators. We have since been notified that the request was approved for allocation during the 2006 calendar year.

Christmas Tree Burn Media Event:

On December 27, 2005, the MCFIA conducted a Christmas Tree Burn Media Event at 1201 Inchon Circle in the City of Marina. (Marina Heights Development) The purpose of the media event was to show the rapid growth of a fire being fueled by a dry Christmas tree inside a residential structure and to urge County residents to remove their Christmas trees as soon as possible after Christmas. A residential living room was furnished with common household items with a dry Christmas tree positioned in a corner of the room. The tree was then set on fire using a lighter and rollover was achieved in about 20 seconds. The room reached the flashover stage in less than 2 minutes. Marina DPS assisted with locating the structure and providing a fire suppression crew and safety Officer. The Seaside Fire Department provided a fire suppression crew and a type I engine. The event received good media coverage from The Salinas Californian, the Register-Pajaronian, and TV-67.

Goals for 2006:

- Continue work on developing a countywide Youth Firesetters Intervention Program.
- Support the countywide efforts in the enforcement and disposing of confiscated fireworks involved in criminal acts.
- Provide opportunities for fire and arson investigation training for local Investigators through class sponsorships, funding allocation, and cooperation with the Central Coast Roundtable of the California Conference of Arson Investigators.
- Review the Monterey County Fire Investigator Request Procedures and the FireComm Investigator Request Procedures for needed updates.
- Continue with the efforts to support the “Change Your Clock – Change Your Battery” program.
- Support the efforts of “Arson Awareness Week” at the local level in Monterey County.
- Monitor legislation that impacts fire investigation activities in the State of California and Monterey County.