



**Monterey County Fire Investigators Association**  
**Monterey County Fire and Arson Task**

**Date:** January 2, 2007

**To:** Chris Orman, Fire Chief  
President, Monterey County Fire Chiefs Association

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

**Subject:** 2006 Annual Report

---

Outlined in this report is an overview of the activities conducted by the Monterey County Fire Investigators Association for 2006.

**Membership:**

We ended the year with 22 active members representing 9 different public safety agencies. Membership is divided into three different categories including active member, associate member, and honorary member.

Active members are from public safety agencies whose 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 the private sector industry or organizations who can contribute to the overall effectiveness of the Association.

Honorary members are open to any person who is elected by the active membership to receive such an 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 of the Fire Investigators Association 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, and have been assigned to investigate fires or explosions for at least one year within their agency. Call-out Investigators must also have approval from the head of their agency for inclusion on the list.

We currently have 11 Investigators, and 1 Investigator Trainee on the Rotational Call-Out List. These Investigators and Trainee represent 6 different fire service agencies. The rotational call-out list is on file with County Communications and is updated as new contact information becomes available. During the calendar year 2006, we received 7 official requests for a Call-Out Investigator. The requests for a Call-Out Investigator are as follows:

1. May 19, 2006 – Structure Fire: 26120 Zadan Road, Hidden Hills, 1600 hours  
Requesting Agency: Salinas Rural Fire Protection District  
Single-family dwelling fire with total loss. Assisted with scene examination, interviews, and photographs.  
Assigned Investigators: Gearhart / Williams / Leist
2. June 27, 2006 – Structure Fire: 251 Orchard Lane, Soledad, 0234 hours  
Requesting Agency: Soledad Fire Department  
Single-family dwelling structure fire with severe damage to one room. Accidental cause, provided investigative report.  
Assigned Investigator: Pilotte
3. July 11, 2006 – Structure Fire: 53471 Main Street, San Lucas, 0245 hours  
Requesting Agency: CDF – San Benito / Monterey County RU  
Commercial property structure fire. Request for investigators cancelled while en route.  
Assigned Investigators: Pilotte / Gunter
4. July 15, 2006 – Structure Fire: 342 Reservation Road, Marina, 0230 hours  
Requesting Agency: Marina Department of Public Safety  
Commercial property structure fire. Accidental cause, provided investigative report.  
Assigned Investigator: Reade
5. July 17, 2006 – Structure Fire: City of Marina  
Requesting Agency: Marina Department of Public Safety  
Telephone consultation with Investigator, no response.  
Assigned Investigator: Williams
6. August 3, 2006 – Vehicle Fire: 819 Barcelona Street, Soledad, 0410 hours  
Requesting Agency: Soledad Fire Department  
Provided investigative report. Cause undetermined.  
Assigned Investigator: Sargenti
7. August 5, 2006 – Structure Fire: 9th Street and Maple, Greenfield, 0247 hours  
Requesting Agency: Greenfield Fire Protection District  
Structure fire, Investigator request canceled while en route to the incident.  
Assigned Investigator: Leist

### **Investigator Training:**

From January 16-18, 2006, 9 members of the Monterey County Fire Investigators Association attended the California Conference of Arson Investigators Training Seminar in San Luis Obispo. In addition, from July 14-17, 2006, several members from the MCFIA attended the CCAI Summer Training Seminar also in San Luis Obispo. All training seminar costs were reimbursed to individual agencies from the local Department of Homeland Security Grant Program. All agencies have since received reimbursement.

### **Federal Aviation Administration Presentation:**

During the regularly scheduled MCFIA meeting of April 13, 2006, Michael Burdick, a Hazardous Materials Specialist with the Federal Aviation Administration, made a presentation on hazardous materials issues aboard aircraft including the illegal shipments of fireworks through air transportation and the follow-up investigations relative to the shipments.

### **Request for Information:**

On April 13, 2006, the MCFIA received a request for information from the Fire Chiefs Association concerning the identification of our purpose, structure, and current work assignments. A written response was sent to the Chiefs Association on May 7, 2006 with the requested information. A copy of the requested information is attached.

### **Change to Fire Investigator Request Procedures:**

In early June of 2006, the MCFIA received information from a member of the Operations Committee that there was a proposed change to Fire Investigator Request Procedures. The proposed change was concerning the method for which an Incident Commander could request a call-out investigator by name. At the time, and after inquiring from several fire service representatives, we were unable to determine either the need for the change or the origin of the proposed change. After evaluating the proposed change, we were opposed to the change and sent a letter to the Operations Committee dated July 6, 2006 explaining our position. Since then, the change was made and is now included in the Fire Investigator Request Procedures dated February 2006. A copy of the opposition letter to the Operations Committee is included in this report.

### **Fireworks Enforcement:**

Prior to the retail fireworks season, the MCFIA issued a press release with supporting information to local media outlets with information concerning the sale and use of "safe and sane" fireworks in Monterey County. A copy of the press release is included in this packet. Along with the Press Release, posters were distributed to jurisdictions that allow the sale and use of "safe and sane" fireworks that stated where fireworks were allowed /

not allowed in Monterey County. Following the fireworks season, representatives from the State Fire Marshal's Office picked up illegal fireworks confiscated by several fire service agencies in Monterey County.

### **Coffee Break Sponsorship During CCAI Conference:**

In support of the California Conference of Arson Investigators, the Monterey County Fire Investigators Association donated \$450.00 towards the cost of a coffee break during the July 2006 CCAI training seminar in San Luis Obispo. CCAI conducts two training seminars per year on relevant fire and arson investigation topics.

### **Juvenile Firesetters Program:**

The MCFIA has started work on developing a countywide Juvenile Firesetters Program. This proposed program would be a division of the MCFIA and would embrace the team approach to addressing the issue of juvenile firesetting. The initial concept is to involve interested members of the fire service, law enforcement, juvenile probation, the school system, and juvenile intervention specialists. The proposal, when fully developed, is to have a Juvenile Firesetters Referral Program available to all public safety agencies within Monterey County. Agencies that have persons interested in being part of the countywide Juvenile Firesetters Program should contact any member of the MCFIA for additional information.

### **“Change Your Clock – Change Your Battery”:**

Prior to the end of daylight savings time on October 29, 2006, a press release was sent to the Monterey County media outlets 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” program is a national campaign sponsored by Energizer Batteries and the International Association of Fire Chiefs. The support of this program comes from the seven fatalities we have experienced in the past several years due to residential structure fires where smoke detections were either not present, not working, or had the batteries removed.

The MCFIA urges the Fire Chiefs Association to make having operating smoke detectors in every residential property within Monterey County a priority by renewing the emphasis of smoke detector programs and supporting national campaigns such as “Change Your Clock – Change Your Battery.” Please refer to our letter dated February 14, 2004 to the Chiefs Association concerning this matter.

### **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 requires 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 was the third State in the nation to have such legislation. This legislation went in effect on January 1, 2007.

### **Christmas Tree Burn Media Event / Press Release:**

Based on the success of the 2005 Christmas Tree Burn Media Event, the MCFIA was planning to conduct the same type of event in 2006. Unfortunately, we were unable to find a suitable location to conduct the event during the desired time frame. In place of the media event, a press release with supporting information was issued on December 27, 2006, by the MCFIA to local media outlets urging citizens to remove Christmas trees from residential properties and public assemblies at the conclusion of the holiday season. The press release cited the dangers of having a dry tree inside a structure as both additional fuel for a separate fire, and as an item first ignited. Following the press release, several related articles appeared in local newspapers.

### **Whistling Firework Ban:**

On December 8, 2006, the MCFIA sent letters to the cities of Soledad, Gonzales, Greenfield, and Marina urging these cities to impose a ban on the future sales and use of whistling type fireworks such as “Piccolo Petes” and “Whistling Phantoms.” The City of Seaside has already passed such legislation effective July 6, 2006. This recommendation is based on the continued misuse and illegal modification of these fireworks along with using the powder of such fireworks as the primary explosive element in homemade pipe bombs. A copy of the letter is included in this report.

### **Goals for 2007:**

- Continue the work on developing a countywide Youth Firesetters Intervention Program with the specific goal of having a proposal to the County Fire Chiefs for implementation of such a program by December 31, 2007.
- Provide opportunities for fire and arson investigator training for local investigators through class sponsorships, funding allocation, and cooperation with the California Conference of Arson Investigators and other fire investigative training outlets.
- Support the countywide efforts in the enforcement and disposing of confiscated fireworks involved in criminal acts.
- Continue with the effort to have a county wide ban on whistling type fireworks.
- Support the “Change your Clock – Change Your Battery” Program by providing timely information to local media outlets.
- Work towards increasing membership with the overall goal of having every fire service agency represented in the MCFIA.

- Extend membership opportunities to law enforcement agencies recognizing that nearly all fire departments in Monterey County turn their fire investigations over to police agencies once the cause of a fire is determined to be arson.
- Establish an effective working relationship with the Monterey County District Attorney's Office with the common goal of supporting arson prosecution in Monterey County.
- Monitor legislation that impacts fire investigation activities in the State of California and Monterey County.