



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

Date: January 7, 2009

To: Mike Urquides, Fire Chief
President, Monterey County Fire Chiefs Association

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

Subject: 2008 MCFIA Annual Report

Outlined in this report is an overview of the activities conducted by the Monterey County Fire Investigators Association in 2008.

Membership:

We ended the year with 16 active members, 1 associate member, and 1 honorary member representing 7 different public safety agencies and one private corporation. 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 8 Investigators, and 1 Investigator Trainee on the Rotational Call-Out List. These Investigators and Trainee represent 4 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 2008, we filled 4 requests for a Call-Out Investigator as indicated below:

1. February 19, 2008 – Structure Fire: 856 Apple Ave., Greenfield, 1927 hrs.
Requesting Agency: Greenfield Fire Department
Vacant single-family dwelling. Cause was undetermined.
Assigned Investigator: Kaminkar, SRFPD
2. March 21, 2008 - Structure Fire: 40020 Pine Avenue, Greenfield, 1800 hours
Requesting Agency: Greenfield Fire Department
Fire in an occupied mobile home. Cause determined to be from a hot water heater that ignited flooring material.
Assigned Investigator: Williams, CALFIRE
3. June 18, 08 – Vegetation Fire: Pine Canyon Road, King City, 1821 hrs.
Requesting Agency: CALFIRE
Vegetation fire in grassland. Approximetly 150 acres. Caused determined to be Arson. Investigative Report completed and turned over to CALFIRE.
Assigned Investigator: Gearhart, Seaside FD
4. August 10, 2008 – Structure Fire: 48123 Highway 1, Big Sur, 1747 hours.
Requesting Agency: Big Sur VFB / CALFIRE
Fire in the kitchen area of the Ventana Inn. Cause of fire determined to be accidental. Investigative report completed and turned over to the Big Sur VFB.
Assigned Investigator: Latham, SFD / McCoun, NCFPD

Call-Out Investigation Summary:

Total Requests Assigned: 4

Requesting Agency:

Greenfield	(2)
Big Sur	(1)
CALFIRE	(1)

California Conference of Arson Investigators:

Members of the Monterey County Fire Investigators Association attended the two California Conference of Arson Investigators semi-annual training seminars in March and November 2008. During 2008 and into 2009, Division Chief Dan Gearhart served,

and will serve, on the Board of Directors and as the Public Information Officer and Legislative Committee Chairperson for CCAI.

Fire Chiefs Association Website:

Since the start of the Fire Chiefs Association Website, the Monterey County Fire Investigators Association has maintained current information on the site. On the MCFIA page, information can be found on current topics relating to fireworks, Christmas Tree Safety, Change Your Clock – Change Your Battery, Association Officers, and the 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008 MCFIA annual report. The Monterey County Fire Investigators Association has registered a domain name of www.mcfia.org and www.mcfia.com. Our goal is to maintain a useful page relating to activities of the MCFIA on the website.

Fireworks Enforcement:

Prior to the retail fireworks season, the MCFIA issued a press packet 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 packet is included with this report. Along with the Press Packet, posters were distributed to jurisdictions that allow the sale and use of “safe and sane” fireworks that states where fireworks were allowed / not allowed in Monterey County.

In addition, the MCFIA held a Press Conference on Fireworks Safety and Enforcement on June 27, 2008 at the Community Center at Soper Field in Seaside. Although Press Releases were sent to all fire and law enforcement agencies in Monterey County, no fire service or law enforcement agency representatives attended the event. Local media that attended included Channel 8, Channel 46, and Channel 67. No print media attended the Fireworks Press Conference. Due to the increased fire activity within the State at that time, the MCFIA gave a specific recommendation for citizens in Monterey County not to use any type of fireworks this year.

During the fireworks season, approximately 20 boxes of illegal fireworks were confiscated by fire and law enforcement agencies in Monterey County. The fireworks are currently being stored by the Seaside Fire Department in a secure location until they are turned over to the State Fire Marshal’s Office for disposal.

The MCFIA is also working on developing a set of countywide standards for the retail sale of safe and sane fireworks for those areas that allow the sale of these fireworks.

“Change Your Clock – Change Your Battery”:

Prior to the end of daylight savings time on November 2, 2008, 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. Our

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

In addition, due to the recent increase in residential fire fatalities, the USFA, along with national fire service leaders, will be holding a press conference on January 7, 2009 on the importance of having a smoke detector. A related article from the Fire Engineering website is attached. Along this same line, the current “Focus on Safety” for the USFA website is Smoke Alarms.

Christmas Tree Safety:

Believing in the importance of alerting the public to the dangers associated with Christmas trees, the MCFIA planned to conduct a Christmas Tree Burn Media Event around the 2008 holiday season. After working towards this goal for several months, the assigned committee met significant logistical challenges that were not easily overcome.

Rather than scraping the project entirely, the committee decided to use stock footage of a Christmas tree burn provided by the National Institute of Standards and Technology and provide a voice over narrative relating to Christmas tree safety. With the assistance of Digital Diaries and Access Monterey Peninsula, Dan Gearhart provided the voice over for the production. The completed project is a 2:00 minute video of a Christmas tree burn with Christmas tree safety tips in both English and Spanish. The video in DVD format was delivered to all local media outlets. In addition, the video has been posted to Youtube.com and can be viewed at the following link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxauj_rfkN4

Annual Crime Victims’ Rights Week:

In March of 2008, the MCFIA was contacted by the Riverside County District Attorney’s Office asking for our sponsorship in the 2nd Annual Crime Victims’ Rights Week from April 13-19, 2008. Being an organization that is involved in victims of crimes, namely Arson, the MCFIA agreed to sign on as a sponsor. Following the event, we received a letter from District Attorney Rod Pacheco thanking us for our support of Crime Victims’ Rights Week.

Endorsement for Superior Court Judge:

Prior to the November election, the MCFIA was contacted by Todd Hornik asking for an endorsement for his campaign for Superior Court Judge in Monterey County. Following a vote of the membership, the MCFIA endorsed Todd Hornik for Superior Court Judge.

Honorary Membership:

On December 8, 2008, an Honorary Membership was extended to Mike Roberson who recently retired from the North County Fire Protection District. The Honorary Membership was based on Mike's support and dedication to the MCFIA and MCFATF while he served in the capacity of Fire Marshal with the NCFPD.

Goals for 2009:

- 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.
- Continue providing a fire and Arson Investigator resource to the fire service in Monterey County by maintaining a qualified pool of Investigators through the Monterey County Fire and Arson Task Force.
- 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 along with the development of countywide standards for the retail sale of safe and sane 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 and support legislation that impacts fire investigation activities in the State of California and Monterey County.