Unit 5: Scene Security

Slide 1

Once you have followed the fire indicators and have narrowed down your general area of origin to a location that includes electrical power lines, power poles or towers, or above ground or underground equipment, what actions are you going to need to take to ensure that the scene and the evidence that it might hold are not compromised?

Slide 2

Objective

Describe the actions needed to ensure that the scene surrounding a Power Line Caused Wildfire is properly maintained.

The evidential size of the scene perimeter may involve more than just that pole or the mid-span of those three lines. It may expand to the poles or towers two or three down in both directions from the general area of origin. While you are looking for evidence in that one spot, what is happening down the line at the “Automatic Recloser” or pole where the “Voltage Regulator” is maintained? These all need to be taken into consideration because potential evidence of the cause of the fire may be at one of these locations.
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Objective

Describe what can be done to meet both the electric utility’s capability to provide safety and reliable service and the fire agency’s authority to conduct a full and complete investigation.

Make the following key points:

- There are two competing goals here that don’t always have to be in conflict.
- By initiating pre-fire discussions and developing an understanding of each entity’s role and responsibilities, both returning the electrical system to full service while conducting the investigation can be accomplished simultaneously.

Investigation Procedures

Make the following key points:

- You won’t do anything different than you would for any other fire investigation. You will follow the same steps and procedures and meet the evidentiary requirements and collection methods that would lead you to develop your causation theory.

- Once you suspect that the electric power system may be involved you should establish your perimeter and prepare for securing that perimeter and the contents within its boundaries as though it were a “major crime scene”.

5-2
Make the following key points:

- The area that is identified as having potential evidence regarding the fire may need to be secured for an extended period of time.

- In many cases, the electric utility may demand that they be allowed into the perimeter to maintain their property and facilities. As the entity with the legal authority to secure the scene and conduct the investigation you have the right to exclude representatives of the power company until you are certain that their activities will not compromise the investigation.

- Simply taping off the ignition area may not be enough.

- To help meet both entity’s goals regarding maintaining the power system and the integrity of the investigation, all activities of the power companies representative should be monitored and any materials or equipment that they remove or change out should be treated as evidence, photographed, documented, and collected by the investigator(s).
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Slide 6

Scene Integrity

Make the following key points:
- You may work your way to the scene and the utility will already be restoring the system. It is imperative that you work with the electric utilities in your area prior to the fires.

Slide 7

Scene Integrity

Make the following key points:
- It may require the removal of specific pieces of hardware, crossarms, lines, including major portions of an entire span, tie wires, insulators, transformers, fuses, or even the pole.
- This is not going to be accomplished in several hours or even a couple of days.
- The scene should be maintained during the entire process or the evidence obtained may be challenged.
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Slide 8

Evidence

Make the following key points:

➢ The amount and size of evidence may be extensive

Slide 9

Scene Unsecured

Make the following key points:

Slide 10

Scene Secured

It may require someone specifically assigned to stay at the ignition area— even overnight.
Unit 5: Scene Security

Slide 11

Make the following key points:

- Scene maintained and utility assisted with evidence recovery.

Slide 12

Pre-Fire Understanding

(ELECTRIC UTILITY)(FIRE AGENCY) PROTOCOLS

It is the intention of ("ELECTRIC UTILITY") and the ("FIRE AGENCY"), hereinafter "the parties" to reach an understanding of reciprocal and mutual cooperation for the purpose of origin and cause fire investigation in those fire incidents where any facilities of (ELECTRIC UTILITY) could be involved (hereinafter "wild fire incidents"). For that reason (ELECTRIC UTILITY) and (FIRE AGENCY) agree to the following guidelines.

Make the following key points:

- See the full protocol document on the Training CD, in the Example Folder of the Appendices File.

- Having this type of understanding with the electric utility claims, legal, vegetation management, and line programs may minimize any problems with the removal of evidence from the ignition area.

- It will assist in obtaining needed documents without having to resort to subpoenas and warrants; help get your needed evidence off the pole; and, help initiate a coordinated response by both you and the utility crews.
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Knowledge Check

Once the General Area of Origin has been determined and has been identified with flagging, you:

A. Can continue with other investigation activities away from the scene
B. Can return to your office and continue your investigation tomorrow
C. Can assign an officer to monitor the area to restrict non-investigative personnel from entry
D. Can join the fire-fighting efforts to minimize fire damage to potential fire cause evidence

Once you leave the scene, even if it has been flagged, that does NOT restrict others from entering the area and compromising the evidence.

In previous cases, fire investigators have returned to an unsecured scene to find the perimeter tape rolled up on a stick and all of the electrical utility equipment changed out with all new material - overnight.
**Knowledge Check**

Developing Fire Investigation and Electric Utility Protocols prior to having a utility related wildfire will do all of the following, except:

A. Assist with the receipt of utility related records and documents
B. Establish a good working relationship with their PIO
C. Help obtain utility equipment and material from poles and towers
D. Assist with initiating a coordinated response to meet investigation and utility restoration goals

The correct answer is: B.

The principle investigative and utility areas that benefit from pre-established protocols involve obtaining utility records, documents used in their normal course of business, obtaining damaged or faulted equipment and material from their facilities as evidence or for testing, and having the contact information of both entities for having a coordinated response to the incident.

It will also help by knowing who will be responding and having a basic working relationship prior to meeting on the scene.

The ole adage of “The Last Time I want to See You for the First Time is in the Middle of the Emergency!” holds true in this case.

TRANSITION to Unit 6: Evidence Collection.