

# THE ROLE OF FIRST RESPONDERS: FIRE INVESTIGATION

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## OBSERVE & DOCUMENT SCENE CONDITIONS

*When approaching a fire scene, responders should establish a parameter and observe and mentally note the following conditions and activities. When conditions permit, initiate permanent documentation (e.g., written notes, voice recordings, videotapes).*

*At a minimum, document the following:*

1. Weather conditions and time of day.
2. The presence, location, and condition of victims and witnesses.
3. Vehicles leaving the scene, bystanders, or unusual activities near the scene.
4. Flame and smoke conditions (e.g., the volume of flames and velocity of smoke; the color, height, and location of the flames; the direction in which the flames and smoke are moving).
5. The type of occupancy and use of the structure (e.g., a residential occupancy or as a business).
6. Conditions of the structure (e.g., alarms sounding, status of utilities, lights turned on; fire through the roof; walls standing; open, closed, or broken windows and doors).
7. Unusual characteristics of the scene (e.g., the presence of containers; exterior burning or charring on the building; the absence of normal contents; unusual odors).
8. Conditions surrounding the scene (e.g., blocked driveways, debris, and damage to other structures).
9. The suppression techniques used, including ventilation, forcible entry, and utility shut-off measures.

## PRESERVE THE SCENE

*Preserve the scene during suppression rescue and suppression operations.*

1. Limit overhaul and avoid spoliation of evidence.
2. Control hose wash to minimize disruption.
3. Avoid removing contents on overhaul if not needed.
4. Avoid using tools that may contaminate the scene.

## SCENE SAFETY

*Control access to ONLY essential personnel. Scene safety overrides all other concerns.*

*Ensuring the safety of victims, bystanders, and public safety personnel is the first responder's foremost concern. Responders must take steps to identify, remove, or mitigate safety hazards that may further threaten victims, bystanders, and public safety personnel. Exercise due caution to avoid injuries to self and others.*

*Upon arrival at the scene, first responders should:*

1. Evaluate the scene for safety hazards (e.g., risk of structural collapse; smoke; electrical, chemical, or biological hazards; and other health risks).
2. Establish parameter to include safety/hazard zones.
3. Communicate hazards to personnel on arriving at the scene.
4. Define and use tools and personal protective equipment appropriate to the task during all operations.
5. Beware of incendiary or explosive devices! The scene may contain devices specifically designed to target responders. Do not touch a suspected incendiary or explosive device. Evacuate the area and request the services of personnel trained in the removal of such items.



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