

INSIDE FIRE



On October 4, 2013, Whitemore Fire Consultants, Inc. hosted over 130 clients, private and public investigators, claims and legal professionals at its 16 Annual Educational Seminar held at the Legend's Golf Club in Prior Lake, Minnesota and featured Michele Stuart of JAG Investigations.

Ms. Stuart, who has worked with the FBI, CIA, Homeland Security and is an adjunct professor at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia, provided a day long presentation on how to use social media to investigate claims and to conduct searches using the resources of the internet.

"It was the best seminar I have attended since 1979" was one of the comments that we received. Ms. Stuart not only provided all who attended with valuable

Investigating Today's Fire Claim Utilizing Social Media

information on how to use the internet in claims investigation as well as people location, she also gave each of us a better insight into the internet.

Ms. Stuart has provided this program to approximately 80 state, local, federal and private corporations during 2013. We were honored and proud to provide this timely program to our clients who received 5 CLE's for this educational seminar. The internet and social media is everywhere, we all learned about the advantages *and* disadvantages of its use and application in our lives.



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Brian P. Haag, CFI

Fire Investigation Teams—Friend or Foe?

By Brian P. Haag, CFI, Senior Fire Consultant

A common discussion at fire scenes the last few years centers around the need, effectiveness, and responsibilities of Fire Investigation Teams (FIT) and their work performed during a fire scene investigation. The conversations are not limited to insurance industry professionals who perhaps have a limited understanding of fire department operations and procedures. I have also spoken to fire department investigators from areas where FIT teams are not established who ask the same questions. As a 24-year firefighter and current member of a FIT team (Wright County), experience as a private origin and cause investigator along with my involvement in the Minnesota Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators, I have listened to and understood all aspects of the conversation. While there is no clear answer to all questions being asked, I do believe there are valid points that can be made that will afford some understanding of the topic.

How Does a FIT Team Operate?

To weigh in on the effectiveness of a FIT Team we must first understand how they operate. In areas served by an established FIT Teams, an Incident Commander at a fire scene can request, through dispatch, that a FIT Team be activated to assist in the investigation. Typically fire departments within a county or association where the team exists assign 1-5 members from their department that are will and able to be a part of the team. These members either have, or will attain within a short period of time, training in fire investigation. When the call is made, the FIT Team personnel from each department that are available respond to the scene and check in with the Incident Commander. Once all FIT Team responders are on-site, a team leader is assigned. The team leader then selects FIT members to perform tasks at the scene to, which may include, interviewing, scene photography, diagramming

and scene processing. Each task typically has more than one team member. Once all tasks are assigned, the team proceeds to perform their task working as a team. When all tasks are completed, the team leader is briefed. It is the responsibility of the team leader to inform the Incident Commander of the conclusion of the team and to complete and submit to the Incident Commander all notes, photographs, logs and a final report. If during the investigation a crime or a potential crime is suspected, the Deputy State Fire Marshal is contacted and reports to the scene and takes over the lead position in the investigation. Not every team operates to this exact model, but it is similar in nature.

Why Do FIT Teams Exist?

In 2004 the Wright County Fire Departments formed the Wright County Fire Investigation Team because at the time our ability to request a Deputy State Fire Marshal was restricted to criteria established by the Wright County Sheriff's Department Investigator or Dispatcher on duty. At the time, the Wright County Sheriff's Department investigators were responsible for investigation of potential crimes in the county but were not certified or even fully trained in fire investigation. As a Fire Chief myself, I understood that the Minnesota Statute requires the Fire Chief or his or her designee to perform an investigation into the origin and cause of a fire for the purpose of fire prevention and enforcement. Like most paid on-call (sometimes called volunteer) department and especially rural departments, our budget constraints limit us from having firefighters that are cross trained in multiple specialty areas such as fire investigation. We relied on the assistance of the Deputy State Fire Marshal's for their expertise, experience and hands-on assistance in processing fire scenes. These duties were not being performed by the Sheriff's Department



Investigators. We felt our only choice was to band a group of investigators together who were willing to respond anywhere within the county at any time of the day to assist the local official with these tasks. We were fortunate to have almost all departments within the county agree to the establishment of this team and to assign firefighters who either had or were willing to receive fire investigation training to assist us.

Not every county or association established their teams for the same reason as Wright County. The reasons may vary slightly, but I would venture a guess that much of it revolved around manpower, experience and availability. Most fire departments respond to less than 10 fires per year that are large enough to prompt a fire scene processing and investigation. Unfortunately, the art of fire scene investigation hinges on the ability of an investigator to get eyes on and hands-on experience by being on a fire scene and performing the tasks of photography, interviewing, report writing and scene processing. No classroom training can be substituted for a real fire scene. Members of a team can double or in some cases triple their experience level by responding to multiple cities within their county or association area. If the team is set up properly, the team members will be performing multiple tasks throughout the year working with investigators of varying expertise and gaining valuable experience themselves while completing the investigation. The use of a team assures the Incident

Fire Investigation Teams—Friend or Foe? (Continued)

Commander that he or she will have the proper personnel on-site at all times of the day to complete the task that he or she has been charged to perform. As an Incident Commander, this assurance decreases our blood pressure and stress.

Why not just contact the Deputy State Fire Marshal for assistance? I get this question all the time. The presence of the Deputy Fire Marshal is priceless for fire departments and is mandated on serious injury, death or unknown arson cases. However, because of the large service area the State Fire Marshal's Office covers, they are not always available and if the fire scene is substantial, the use of multiple investigators is essential. In a perfect world, the FIT Team works side-by-side and at the direction of the Deputy State Fire Marshal. This provides the Deputy Fire Marshal with the manpower, and the team members can learn from their experience.

Are FIT Teams Effective?

If I asked 10 private investigators who were hired to perform an origin and cause investigation at a location after a FIT team was used by the fire department to complete an investigation, I am sure I would receive a variety of answers, even from the same investigator, based on how the fire scene was processed. I consider myself somewhat stubborn about how a fire scene is processed and prefer to "dig" the area of origin myself if possible. However, even

I can appreciate performing an investigation when the debris has been properly processed, artifacts and contents are reconstructed and interviews of all occupants, fire crews and witnesses have been conducted along with the entire report, photographs and documents are handed over to me on the scene or within days of my investigation. But, that is not always the case. Sometimes we find that the scene processing has placed potential artifacts of concern outside the structure, the contents are displaced and not reconstructed and conclusions are opined that contrast to our findings. These are the instances that those who do not believe in the concept of a FIT Team, use as ammunition to derail the teams. I will confess that I have experienced such fire scenes and it is not the desired result. But, is the exclusive to FIT Teams? I think not. I have had just as many fire scenes that were processed by a local fire investigator where the same issues occur. So should we now push to eliminate all fire investigators who are not experienced enough to complete the task based on our expectations? If you answered yes to this question, then you should also pursue banishment of fire departments that destroy a fire scene unnecessarily before an investigator has the opportunity to perform an investigation. Good luck with that one.

Conclusion

I realize that a simple article such as this will not change the minds of everyone who has had a memorable experience, either good or bad, with a FIT Team fire scene. What I hope to accomplish is to inform and educate people who are not familiar with the fire industry on how

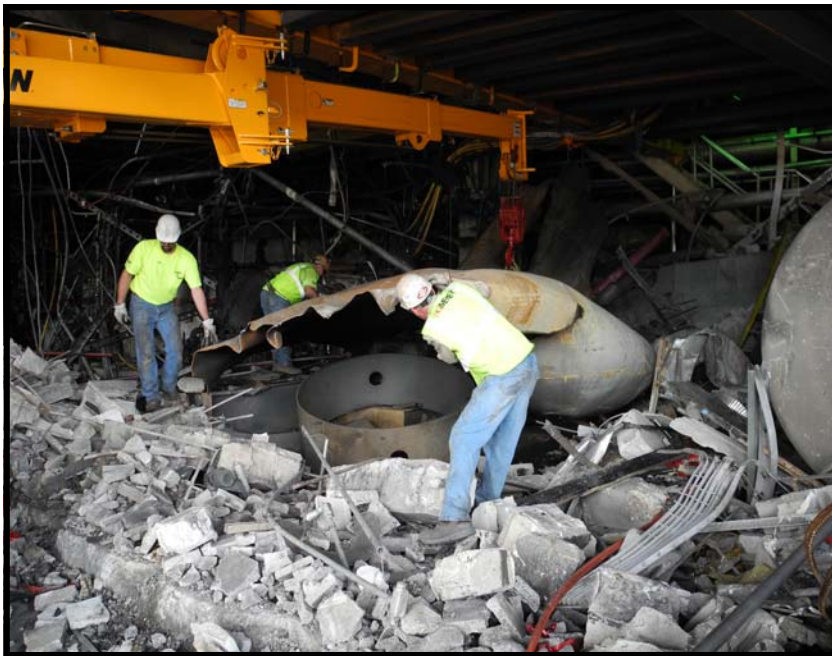
the teams were established and the intent of their existence. I anticipate that I will continue to field the questions, "What do we do about these FIT Teams?" To me the answer is quite simple and right before our eyes. We should not fear the work of a FIT Team, or try to eliminate their existence throughout the state. Instead, we should try to understand and embrace the concept behind the team and work side-by-side with them so we can

provide some hands-on training and education to investigators who are eagerly searching for it. Each of us started in this field with no experience, and yet somehow we were provided the opportunity to gain that education and expertise under the direction and supervision of a more qualified individual.

Expertise in the field of fire investigation is an "on the job" training module. It can only be achieved by participating in real fire scenes over and over again. Where would be today if we never receive that opportunity? If we each take time to work with these

teams and team members, or maybe provide free training to those that have an interest and support them each time we have that interaction, then before we know it we will have completed the ultimate goal we all strive for. We will have provided to our communities and state a new breed and generation of fire investigators. And isn't that our goal, providing fire prevention, fire cause determination and enforcement on a new level?

Brian P. Haag, CFI is the Fire Chief of the Annandale Fire Department and a Senior Fire Consultant, Certified Fire Investigator with Whitmore Fire Consultants, Inc. For more information pertaining to this article, please contact Brian at bhaag@whitmorefire.com.





Facebook Graph Search (Reprint from PI Magazine)

By Michele Stuart, JAG Investigations (www.jaginvestigations.com)

What is Social Media?

Social Media—refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks.

Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Furthermore, social media depends on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. It introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities, and individuals.

Social media differentiates from traditional/industrial media in many aspects such as quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence. There are many effects that stem from internet usage. According to Nielsen, internet users continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other type of site. At the same time, the total time spent on social media in the U.S. across PC and mobile devices increased by 37 percent to 121 billion minutes in July 2012 compared to 88 billion minutes in July 2011. For content contributors, the benefits of participating in social media have gone beyond simply social sharing to building reputation and bringing in career opportunities and monetary income, as discussed in Tang, Gu, and Whinston (2012).

Much of the criticism of social media are about its exclusiveness as most sites do not allow the transfer of information from one to another, disparity of information available, issues with trustworthiness and

reliability of information presented, concentration, ownership of media content, and the meaning of interactions created by social media. However, it is also argued that social media has positive effects such as allowing the democratization of the internet while also allowing individuals to advertise themselves and form friendships.

Most people associate social media with positive outcomes yet this is not always the case. Due to the increase in social media websites, there seems to be a positive correlation between the usage of such media with online sexual predators, and the decrease in face-to-face interactions. Social media may expose children to images of alcohol, tobacco, and sexual behaviors.¹

¹ Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia definition — www.wikipedia.org



Michele Stuart

The following article is a reprint from PI Magazine. For more information about PI Magazine, please visit their website at: www.pimagazine.com

Many of us that have a Facebook® account or utilize the social platform in an investigative way have probably heard of the new Facebook search engine—Graph Search. Facebook representatives are claiming this will be a whole new way of searching your own and other's interconnections by key words or associated word lookups.

These searches will be mitigated by the user's privacy settings via their activity log. "Graph Search" is designed to show you the answer

and not links to answers," said Mark Zuckerberg. Some of these searches will allow the user to search for people based on what they have "liked" or what they have shared on their profiles. For example: "My Friends who live in Phoenix" or "People who work for ABC Company" or even "Michele Stuart's friends that like guns." Think of a "liked" post made years ago about *weed* and how that can come back and haunt the present (just think of the intelligence you can gather there!) Additionally, the user will be able to look for photos of themselves or of their friends *including photos that are hidden from timeline*. Think about this simple search: "Photos taken on January 1, 2013" or "Photos Michele Stuart liked" or "Photos containing the word (****)". Going one step further, the graph search will allow the user to search for places their friends have visited in a simple search as: "Places Michele Stuart was tagged in". The searches can be long and as crazy as one likes: "Friends of my friends who like the Arizona Cardinals and who I am not friends with" or "People who I am not friends with but work at PI Magazine" or "People who like baseball and lives nearby" - think of the potential to collect information this way!

To control what can be searched the user needs to control what can be seen on their own profile. To do this, the user needs to edit their activity log. Each comment or like may be custom set. Also make sure to check for and delete any likes or comments you may have made on a public profile. Make sure to review photographs you have shared or have been tagged in. *Note: Even photographs that are untagged can still be discoverable by others on Facebook.* Depending on how long you have had your Facebook and how active you are and have been in the past, removing your likes and tagged pictures can be a very time consuming task!

Another interesting part of Graph Search is if it cannot return a positive result, it will actually default to an automatic Bing search.

To get the full story on the search capabilities of the Graph Search, please visit the following website: <https://www.facebook.com/about/graphsearch>

Whitemore Fire Consultants, Inc. Attends AVCAW/WIASIU Seminar in Wisconsin Dells



Congratulations to the Wisconsin Chapter of the International Association of Special Investigation Units and the Anti Vehicle Crime Association, who held their 19th Annual Seminar on Insurance Fraud on October 15 & 16 at the Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin.

Whitemore Fire Consultants, Inc. was proud and honored to be asked to provide an exhibitor's booth at the seminar. We met many investigators and companies that attended the two day conference and enjoyed our time interacting with the attendees..

Thank you to the Wisconsin Chapter of the IASIU and AVCA for their warm hospitality. Congratulations on your successful seminar!

News About Us



I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who attended our 16th Annual Educational Seminar, Investigating Today's Fire Claim Utilizing Social Media. I especially want to extend my thanks and appreciation to Michele Stuart of JAG Investigations. Her unique perspective and expertise in utilizing the internet and social media for investigations was to say the least, eye-opening.

I had the opportunity to hear Michele's presentation at the 2013 Minnesota Chapter IAAI conference. It was at that time that I decided that we should bring her back to Minnesota to provide her program to our clients, claims and legal professionals, and to open the seminar to public (police & fire) investigators so they too could hear her important message. We are pleased that over 15 different police and fire department representatives, along with several Minnesota Deputy State Fire Marshals took time out of their schedules to attend our seminar. 136 of our clients and friends we hope walked away with newfound information on how to utilize the internet and social media in their investigations.

I also want to extend my congratulations to Brian Whitemore who recently successfully challenged the International Association of Arson Investigator's Certified Fire Investigation test. It has always been my philosophy and requirement that all Whitemore Fire Consultants, Inc. investigators be CFI-certified. With the success of Brian, we are now all CFI-certified. Another way that we represent and work for our clients.

Thanks to all of you who continue to support the work that we do. We will always strive to provide you with the very best investigation in an ethical and professional manner. Please have a safe Halloween and don't forget to check your smoke detectors—Daylight Savings Time will be ending on November 3rd!

Robert B. Whitemore, CFI
President



CPSC Provides Halloween Statistics

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Halloween ranks among the top 5 days of the year for candle-related fires. To prevent candle fires, CPSC encourages consumers never to leave a burning candle unattended. Battery-operated flameless candles and other flameless lighting are safe alternatives to traditional candles. Additional safety tips to help make this year's holiday safe:



Decorations

- Keep candles and jack o' lanterns away from landings and doorsteps, where costumes could brush against the flame.
- Remove obstacles from lawns, steps, and porches when expecting trick-or-treaters.
- When indoors, keep candles and jack o' lanterns away from curtains, decorations, and other items that could ignite. Do not leave burning candles unattended.
- Whether indoors or outside, use only decorative light strands that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory. Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Discard damaged sets.

Don't overload extension cords.

Halloween-related incidents can involve a number of hazards, including burns from flammable costumes that come into contact with open flames-particularly candles used to illuminate jack-o-lanterns; falls and abrasions from ill-fitting costumes, shoes, and accessories; and fires caused by burning candles left unattended, near combustible decorations or knocked over by kids and pets.

Prevent Fires & Burns

- Select flame retardant materials when buying or making costumes and accessories.
- Choose battery-operated candles and lights instead of open flame candles.

More Pictures From Investigating Today's Fire Claim Utilizing Social Media . . .



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Dutchmen Manufacturing Recall Recreational Vehicle— Furnace Recall Due to Fire & Carbon Monoxide



The National Highway Traffic Administration has issued the following recall notification:

Dutchmen/Aspen Trail, Dutchmen/Coleman and Dutchmen/Dutchmen, model years 2012-2103 recreational vehicle. Dutchmen is recalling certain model year 2012-2013 Aspen Trail, Coleman and Dutchmen recreational vehicles manufactured from October 4, 2011 through October 1, 2012. These vehicles may have been manufactured without an exterior vent for the furnace.

Without proper exhaust ventilation, the vehicle can fill with carbon monoxide resulting in asphyxiation. The heat build up may also increase the risk of a fire.

Dutchmen will notify owners and dealers will inspect and as necessary, install an exterior vent free of charge. The manufacturer has not yet provided a notification schedule. Consumers should contact Dutchmen at 1-574-537-0700 for more information.

Schneider Electric Recalls APC Surge Protectors (2nd Notice)

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission in cooperation with American Power Conversion (APC) now known as Schneider Electric IT Corporation of West Kingston, Rhode Island has voluntarily issued a recall on the APC SurgeArrest protectors, manufactured in China and the Philippines. The surge protectors can overheat, smoke and melt, posing a fire hazard.



Approximately 1.5 million units were sold nationwide at Best Buy, Circuit City, CompUSA and other stores from January 1993 through December 2002 for between \$13 and \$50. The firm has received 700 reports of the surge protectors overheating and melting and 55 claims of property damage from smoke and fire. There are 13 reports of injuries, including smoke inhalation and contact burns from touching the overheated surge protectors.

This recall involves APC 7 and 8 series SurgeArrest surge protectors manufactured before 2003. The model and serial numbers are located on a label on the bottom of the surge protector. The two numbers that follow the first letter or letters in the serial number sequence indicate the year of manufacture. The unit is included in the recall if the numbers are 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 00, 01 or 02. APC and the words Personal, Professional, Performance or Network are printed on the surge protectors. For a complete list of model numbers included in this recall, please visit www.cpsc.gov and click on "recalls".



Consumers should immediately stop using the recalled surge protectors, unplug them and contact Schneider Electric for a free replacement surge protector. For more information contact Schneider Electric IT Corp., toll-free at (888) 437-4007 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET Monday through Friday, or online at <http://recall.apc.com>, or www.apc.com and click on the Recall link to submit a claim.

RECALLS

Volkswagon of America, Inc. Recalls 2013-2014 Audi S6 & S7



Volkswagon Group of America (Volkswagon) is recalling approximately 3,594 model-year 2013-14 Audi S6 and S7 vehicles and approximately 1,120 A8 and S8 vehicles. A manufacturing issue may cause certain model-year 2013-14 S6 and S7 equipped with the 4.0-liter engines to leak fuel. This could lead to a fire.

In an unrelated recall, Audi is also recalling model-year 2013-2014 A8 and S8 and S7's equipped with a standard sunroof and manufactured between March 12 and July 15, 2013. The sunroof could shatter, increasing the risk for accident and injury.

Audi parent Volkswagon stated it is unaware of any accidents related to either recall issue.

Dealers will inspect and replace the affected fuel lines and sunroofs for free.

Audi has already begun to notify owners affected by both recalls. Owners can also contact Audi at 800-822-2834 or the National Highway Safety Administration at 888-327-4236 for more information.



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Click on "registration", complete the form and press "submit". It's easy and you won't miss a thing!

Easy go to the **Whitemore Fire Consultant's** Website:

www.whitemorefire.com

Click on "Submit a Loss" tab

Complete the online form and press "submit" and you will receive an electronic confirmation of our receipt of your loss request. You will also receive a response from our on-call representative as well as a follow-up all during the next business day.



Submit Your Loss Online