

NFPA® 1321

Standard for Fire Investigation Units

2025 Edition



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NFPA® 1321

Standard for

Fire Investigation Units

2025 Edition

This edition of NFPA 1321, *Standard for Fire Investigation Units*, was prepared by the Technical Committee on Fire Investigation Units and acted on by the NFPA membership during the 2024 NFPA Technical Meeting held June 20, 2024. It was issued by the Standards Council on July 17, 2024, with an effective date of August 5, 2024.

This edition of NFPA 1321 was approved as an American National Standard on August 5, 2024.

Origin and Development of NFPA 1321

NFPA 1321, *Standard for Fire Investigation Units*, 2024 edition, is the first NFPA document to address minimum requirements relating to the establishment, structure, operation, and management of fire investigation units (FIUs).

Initiated through a project request in September 2017, the Standards Council requested input on the proposed standard. Creation of the Technical Committee on Fire Investigation Units, which is the committee responsible for NFPA 1321, was approved at the December 2018 Standards Council meeting. This technical committee was charged with primary responsibility for standards relating to the development and composition of FIUs. This committee does not have responsibility for the development of standards relating to fire investigation techniques and methodologies or fire investigator professional qualifications.

The committee includes a balance of representatives from the fire service, insurance industry, subject matter textbook publishers, special experts, and stakeholders actively engaged in fire dynamics research.

The focus of this document is to improve the quality of the work products and operations of fire investigation units by specifying policy requirements for organizations, including management systems, resources, health and safety, and documentation and reports. In addition, the document specifies policy requirements for personnel education, training, and certification.

In 2009, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) issued a report titled *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*. The NAS report called for all forensic practitioners to be certified, to work in accredited organizations, and to follow standard methodology. This report resulted in a new interest in improving the quality of all the forensic science disciplines, including the investigation of fires and explosions. The formation of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) was a concrete step that responded to this demand to develop and identify standards and guides that support professional quality investigations. The project request for a new standard and the eventual development of NFPA 1321 were a result of the identified need to improve the quality of work in fire investigation units and to establish a standard consistent with accepted industry standards and guidelines.



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NOTE: Membership on a committee shall not in and of itself constitute an endorsement of the Association or any document developed by the committee on which the member serves.

Committee Scope: This Committee shall have primary responsibility for standards relating to the development and composition of Fire Investigation Units (FIU). This committee does not have responsibility for the development of standards relating to fire investigation techniques, methodologies, or fire investigator professional qualifications.

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NOTICE: An asterisk (*) following the number or letter designating a paragraph indicates that explanatory material on the paragraph can be found in Annex A.

A reference in brackets [] following a section or paragraph indicates material that has been extracted from another NFPA document. Extracted text may be edited for consistency and style and may include the revision of internal paragraph references and other references as appropriate. Requests for interpretations or revisions of extracted text shall be sent to the technical committee responsible for the source document.

Information on referenced and extracted publications can be found in Chapter 2 and Annex C.

Chapter 1 Administration

1.1 Scope.

1.1.1 This standard shall specify the minimum requirements relating to the establishment, structure, operation, and management of fire investigation units (FIUs).

1.1.2 In cases where an FIU has a parent organization such as a fire department and policies already exist that establish the minimum requirements outlined within this document, the FIU shall be considered as having those requirements as part of their unit.

1.1.3* This standard shall not provide requirements relating to fire investigation methodology.

1.1.4* This standard shall not provide requirements relating to professional qualifications of fire investigators.

1.2* Purpose. This standard shall define the minimum requirements necessary for the effective operation and management of FIUs and to provide high-quality fire and explosion investigations.

1.3 Application. This standard shall apply to all public and private FIUs.

Chapter 2 Referenced Publications

2.1 General. The documents or portions thereof listed in this chapter are referenced within this standard and shall be considered part of the requirements of this document.

2.2 NFPA Publications. National Fire Protection Association, 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169-7471.

NFPA 1033, *Standard for Professional Qualifications for Fire Investigator*, 2022 edition.

2.3 Other Publications.

2.3.1 US Government Publications. US Government Publishing Office, 732 North Capitol Street, NW, Washington, DC 20401-0001, www.gpo.gov.

Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations, “Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA),” 2016.

2.3.2 Other Publications.

Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition, Merriam-Webster, Inc., Springfield, MA, 2020.

2.4 References for Extracts in Mandatory Sections.

NFPA 921, *Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations*, 2024 edition.

NFPA 1033, *Standard for Professional Qualifications for Fire Investigator*, 2022 edition.

NFPA 1550, *Standard for Emergency Responder Health and Safety*, 2024 edition.

Chapter 3 Definitions

3.1 General.

3.1.1 The definitions contained in this chapter shall apply to the terms used in this standard.

3.1.2 Where terms are not defined in this chapter or within another chapter, they shall be defined using their ordinarily accepted meanings within the context in which they are used.

3.1.3 *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition, shall be the source for the ordinarily accepted meaning.

3.2 NFPA Official Definitions.

3.2.1* Approved. Acceptable to the authority having jurisdiction.

3.2.2* Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ). An organization, office, or individual responsible for enforcing the requirements of a code or standard, or for approving equipment, materials, an installation, or a procedure.

3.2.3 Shall. Indicates a mandatory requirement.

3.2.4 Should. Indicates a recommendation or that which is advised but not required.

3.2.5 Standard. An NFPA standard, the main text of which contains only mandatory provisions using the word “shall” to