
ARSON IDENTIFICATION AND PREVENTION

An Overview of Serial Wildfire Arson Investigation

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SHORT BIO(S)

Richard Woods – Mr. Woods has over 45 years of experience in Australian wildfire management, specializing in wildfire investigation for 31 years. He established the NSW Rural Fire Service's investigation program and authored Australia's 'National Strategy to Reduce Bushfire Arson.' Mr. Woods lectures at Charles Sturt University and has delivered wildfire investigation training internationally. He was retained by the NSW Coroner as an expert during the 2019/20 Black Summer Bushfire inquest. He directs Wildfire Investigations and Analysis, providing expert opinion and international training. He holds multiple credentials, including a Graduate Diploma in Fire Investigation and a Graduate Certificate in Applied Management.

Shawn Zimmermaker – Mr. Zimmermaker is the northern region deputy chief of law enforcement and fire prevention for CAL FIRE, overseeing major fire investigations, arson cases, and civil cost recovery. He chairs the NWCG Wildland Fire Investigation Subcommittee and contributed to revising NFPA 921's wildland fire investigation chapter. Mr. Zimmermaker holds a Bachelor of Science from Humboldt State University, with a major in forestry and minors in watershed management and environmental ethics. He is an IAAI-CFI, NAFI-CFEI, NWCG INV/INV L, and a Registered Professional Forester.

Theo Bailey – Mr. Bailey is the Director of Wildfire Prevention and Investigations for the Province of Alberta, Canada. He oversees Alberta's Wildfire Investigation, compliance, and enforcement programs, which includes serial arson investigations, civil cost recovery files, and all other high complex Wildfire Investigation in the province. He has worked as a Wildfire Investigator since 2012, leading dozens of wildfire arson investigations in that time. He is a lead instructor in Alberta, delivering Wildfire Investigation training to public agencies across Canada. Mr. Bailey attended Macewan University and Athabasca University and majored in Criminal Justice. He is an IAAI-ECT, and INV/INV L.

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Wildfire arson is often viewed as an abhorrent and inexplicable crime, which has the potential to cause damage, destruction and loss. A single match can tie up emergency services for hours, days and even weeks. All countries that have wildfire risk, experience varying levels of wildfire arson. A series of wildfire ignitions across a jurisdiction may not all be arson-related, however, until a proactive approach is taken to accurately determine their cause and ultimately reduce the number of ignitions, communities will remain at heightened risk from unplanned wildfires.

The three presenters are active members of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Wildfire Investigation Subcommittee, where they lead the development of Wildfire Investigation training courses (FI-110, FI-210, FI-310, more) and reference materials such as PMS-412. They will share their experiences and knowledge on the topic and facilitate discussion with the attendees.

45 min – Richard Woods will present on the key areas that need to be considered by public agencies when addressing the issue of Serial Wildfire Arson. Too often the crime is given to law enforcement to solve, with very little understanding of where to start to investigate the issue of ‘unexplained’ ignitions.

The key areas to be delivered in this presentation include;

- Commonly encountered hurdles in Serial Wildfire Arson Investigations.
- Commonly recognised traits and motives of Serial Wildfire arsonists.
- An overview of strategies to address the issue and identify those responsible.

Woods’ presentation is based on his 2023 ‘Wildfire Arson Prevention Guide’* that gives fire and law enforcement officials worldwide a starting point to address the issue of wildfire arson.

1.5 hrs – Theo Bailey (Alberta, Canada) and Shawn Zimmermaker (California, USA) will each present case studies highlighting serial arson investigations that incorporate the principles that Woods presents, utilizing techniques taught in the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) FI-310 Arson Investigation training course. Both presenters will highlight the linkages between these real-world serial wildfire arson investigations and the teachings from the FI-310 course.

45 min – With the remaining workshop time, presenters will host an open discussion, with attendees being invited to share their questions, feedback, and experiences with wildfire arson investigations in their jurisdictions.

The presentations and discussion will give attendees an understanding of the challenges and solutions to address Serial Wildfire Arson and an appreciation of how the issue of unplanned deliberate Wildfire ignitions can be successfully addressed.

Keywords: Serial wildfire arson, Arson investigation techniques, Law enforcement and fire agencies collaboration, NWCG training (FI-110, FI-210, FI-310), Arson prevention strategies

More information

Length of the workshop:	3 hours
Number of participants*:	N/A
Special facility needs:	LCD Projector

* Workshops with fewer attendees than the minimum number may be canceled at the discretion of the conference organizers.