



**Appendix 5**  
**National Association of State Fire Marshals**  
**Fire Research & Education Foundation**  
**“Conquering the ‘Unknowns’” Data Project**  
**In-Depth Interview Protocol**  
**Feb 4, 2013**

**Introduction:**

The National Association of State Fire Marshals Foundation is conducting a research project to better understand the reasons behind undetermined origin and unknown cause entries in fire incident data and suggest strategies for overcoming barriers to more complete reporting. As part of this project, we are talking to fire department personnel around the country to learn more about incident data reporting practices, training and education about reporting, how reporting is viewed by firefighters, and how your department deals with origin and cause data. You can help by being completely candid with your answers. We will not be identifying you by name or department in our final report, but your honest answers will give us great insights into the nature of the problem and how fire departments might address it.

I will be recording this call for our records, so that we can go back and transcribe the responses - again, the intent is not to identify individuals but to make sure that the responses are recorded accurately. Do I have your permission to record this call?

**I. Initial Questions**

What type of department are you (Volunteer, Combination, Career)?  
What population do you serve?  
What is your role in the department regarding data reporting?

**II. Understanding reporting practices**

About how many incident forms does your department complete in a year?

What is the process for completing the forms?  
Walk me through the process that happens after a fire.

Who completes the forms?  
How experienced are these people?  
How is the incident reporting task delegated in your department?  
How is the person/people selected?

When are the forms completed?

Is there a deadline to complete the forms (e.g., by end of shift? Within \_\_\_\_ amount of time after the incident?)

What oversight exists for checking forms?

Is the oversight done at the department level? State level?

Are there any shortcuts that you know about for completing the forms?

I've heard of some departments where copies of forms with pre-filled responses are available for different structure fires.

About how long does it take to complete an NFIRS form for the following types of incidents?

1. residential structure fire with no injuries that destroys a house
2. car fire
3. firefighter injury, but not deaths
4. civilian injury, but not deaths

How are data reports handled for fires that are referred for investigation?

Does your department have in-house investigations for determining origin and cause, or do you rely on an outside agency?

What choice is made in the "cause of ignition" field if there is no further investigation expected and the cause is undetermined? Is it left as "under investigation" or updated to "undetermined after investigation"?

How are "under investigation" findings handled? Do investigative findings subsequently get reported on the incident fire report?

If yes, is there a procedure in place for that, or does it sometimes happen and sometimes not?

Does an incident that is referred for investigation automatically get coded as undetermined origin and/or unknown cause?

Are there any barriers in your department to determining origin and cause?

### **III. Training and education about the forms**

How do firefighters learn about NFIRS and how to complete the data form?

Did you receive any training in Firefighter I on NFIRS or data collection?

Are people in your department trained in origin and cause determination?

Does your department have any policies, guidelines or formal training on NFIRS?  
Does this training involve how to use the software and input the data?  
Does the training involve concepts such as what NFIRS is trying to accomplish, how different data elements relate to one another, etc.?

Does your state provide training and support on NFIRS?

Are you aware of the NFIRS training options available from the US Fire Administration (including online training)?

Do you think that more training and education on data reporting would be helpful?  
How would that training best be delivered?  
Are there any barriers to getting more training in your department?

#### **IV. Understanding how reporting is viewed by firefighters**

Why do you fill out incident reports? How do you feel about reporting?

How do the firefighters you work with talk about the NFIRS reporting?  
Do people consider completing these forms as a legitimate part of their job?

Are there particular parts of the form that people complain about, or do they complain about reporting in general?

Do you think that people in your department take reporting seriously?

#### **V. Feedback about the information collected**

Does your department use NFIRS data?  
If so, how?

Is the data submitted by your department to NFIRS is used by anyone afterwards?  
Who else uses your department's data?

Have you read any national analyses based on data collected by NFIRS?

Do you know if your department's reports are part of the national NFIRS database?

#### **VI. Addressing missing data**

How confident are you of the quality of the incident data submitted by your department?

What do you know about the quality of data in your department?

Are you aware of the percentage of blank and unknown or undetermined responses in your department's incident data?

If not, Do you know how you can find out?

If yes, Do you think that percentage is too high, or about right?

If too high, Why do you think so much data is missing from the NFIRS reports?

Is the form difficult to use?

Is the form too long?

Are firefighters told not to assign a cause for any reason?

Do incidents under investigation never get updated?

What are barriers in your department to completing the NFIRS reports accurately?

Training issues

Issues with the forms/system

Cultural/human behavior issues

Are there ways in your department to review data reports for missing data?

Do you know of ways to reduce the percentage of missing data on these forms?

Do you know about tools that are available from US Fire Administration to identify incomplete reports?

Electronic application?

Incentives?

Feedback of information?

Thank you for your time.