



# LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT

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FIRE CHIEF

August 24, 2023

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS  
FILE NO. 23-084

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners

FROM:  Kristin M. Crowley, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: ARSON COUNTER-TERRORISM SECTION OVERVIEW

FINAL ACTION:	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved w/Corrections	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
	<input type="checkbox"/> Denied	<input type="checkbox"/> Received & Filed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

## SUMMARY

This report intends to give the Board of Fire Commissioners an overview of what the Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section (ACTS) does. This report can stand alone but is intended to prepare the Board of Fire Commissioners for the September 5, 2023 presentation. The report uses statistical data from NFIRS, Elite, Fire Stat, and LAFD Incident Achieves.

## RECOMMENDATION

That the Board:  
Receive and File

## DISCUSSION

**MISSION STATEMENT:** The Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section is committed to determining the origin and cause of fires within the City of Los Angeles. To investigate and apprehend those responsible for criminal fires and increase safety through collaboration with our public partners and our community.

**THE ARSON COUNTER-TERRORISM SECTION ETHOS:** Our Code of Ethics is the standard of behavior that the Los Angeles City Fire Department expects our members to adhere to in their daily activities and dealing with others. The Code of Ethics cannot foresee every situation that might arise. Instead, it identifies guiding principles to help the Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section members make decisions consistent with the LAFD's organizational values and goals.

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ARSON SECTION**

The Los Angeles City Fire Department's Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section prides itself on integrity and fostering open communication with area partners and the community. Being honest, forthright, and consistent in our dealings with others fosters a positive work environment. The Section benefits when the Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section members practice and promote ethical behavior. All investigators in the Section are Peace Officers under Section 830.37 of the California Penal Code. In order to maintain their law enforcement status and related skills, Arson Investigators train regularly with the Los Angeles Police Department and other allied agencies.

The ACTS staffing positions consist of 19 investigators and three supervisors. Currently, we are staffed with one Battalion Chief, one Captain II, one Captain I, two Senior Investigators, one K9 handler, one Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco Firearms and Explosives / Task Force Officer (ATF/TFO) Investigator, along with 8 Investigators that work a 4/10 schedule. Five members are assigned to A-unit 1, the only 24-hour arson unit for all 468 square miles of the City of Los Angeles. Additionally, we have one civilian clerk typist on loan from the Metro Fire Communications Division.

The ACTS shares the responsibility of fire Investigation with the Emergency Operations Bureau (EOPS). This responsibility is granted under the authority of the Los Angeles City Charter. The incident commander is ultimately responsible for the cause determination of any fire. Still, they can call in Arson Investigators to assist with investigations such as fire fatalities, house of worship fires, domestic terrorism incidents, and large-scale fires, to name a few.

The ACTS has long-standing partnerships with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives (ATF), The Federal Bureau of Investigations, and the National Response Team (NRT) for its K-9 Unit. These reciprocal relationships help the ACTS request additional help from specialized agencies, receive and maintain specialized tools and equipment within the Section (e.g., ATF/TFO, Accelerant detection K9), and assist agencies all over the western United States when needed.

ACTS is a small section within the LAFD, making up approximately 0.005% of the department's membership. Even with such a small percentage, the Section responded to 3,186 calls for service in 2022 and was successful in making 164 arrests. These arrests represent countless hours of work that begin with the laborious efforts of a fire scene investigation.

A fire company may spend three or four hours on the scene of an incident, putting out a fire and overhauling it. An Arson Investigator can spend 16 to 25 hours on one incident, not including court time. On scene, the Investigators can spend several hours sifting through fire debris, identifying burn patterns, collecting evidence, and anything else that can unlock the mystery of what happened. Once an ACTS investigator determines a crime has occurred, the long hours of putting the case together begin. The Investigators take off their firefighter helmets and put on their detective hats.

After an Arson investigator clears a fire scene for overhaul or turns it over to the owner, they spend large amounts of time interviewing witnesses, interviewing suspects, canvassing the area for video cameras, following up on and chasing down leads, writing warrants, subpoenaing phone records and correlating data to name a few. They also set up and manage surveillance and serve the warrants that the investigator writes.

Once the case is all pulled together, the investigators put themselves into harm's way, doing the most dangerous part of their job: making an arrest. The Investigators can do this because they are not only firefighters but also peace officers. ACTS Investigators are Division 99 of the LAPD, which further aids the collaborations between the two departments.

With the criminal behind bars, the investigator continues to put the case together. These cases, depending on the size and complexity, can take days, weeks, or sometimes even months to put together.

The ACTS has created a Strategic Plan that will act as a road map to help guide the Arson Section on a pathway to making the ACTS investigator's jobs safer and less complicated and improve accountability.

In addition, it will improve public safety, create a positive work environment, foster collaboration with internal and external partners, improve performance management, enhance technology and innovation, and improve operational readiness. A copy of the Strategic Plan has been included as an attachment for a complete picture of what the ACTS hopes to accomplish in the next three years.

Some of the highlights of the ACTS Strategic Plan are to acquire adequate safety equipment for the investigators, obtain a case management system, obtain a management analysis, and grow the Section to meet the needs of the Citizens of Los Angeles.

The Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section has identified a case management system that will vastly outperform the current Excel spreadsheet, tracking the progression of casework. With a case management system, the ACTS can accurately track the movement of cases from inception to trial. It will help collect data that can be analyzed and identify workload issues. Both the ACTS and the LAFD Information and Technology Bureau (ITB) have vetted the designed program, and the last hurdle is identifying funding.

The Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section has identified a case management system that will vastly outperform the current excel spreadsheet, which will track the progression of case work. With a case management system, ACTS will be able to accurately track the movement of cases from inception all the way to trial. The program will help collect data that can be analyzed, and identify and coordinate workload issues. Both the ACTS and the Information and Technology Bureau have vetted the appropriate program. We are exploring funding options and capability with management.

Currently, ACTS command staff and investigators are working diligently and collaboratively to get the department and public the statistical data that supports our mission and strategic plan. This case management system will accomplish this goal. An associated statistical and analysis challenge deals with clerical staff.

The section would benefit by creating statistical reports requested by Battalions, Bureaus and the news media. One example of having dedicated clerical staff is the ability to track and monitor arson data to identify trends and patterns so that detailed reports can highlight areas of interest, areas of concern, and potential threats. This work is best conducted by a Management Analyst and supportive clerical staff.

## **TRENDS WITHIN THE ARSON SECTION**

The following is a summary of data collected by the ACTS. The data comes from multiple sources, including NFIRS, Elite, Fire Stat, and LAFD Incident Achieves.

### **Fires by Incident Type**

#### **Calendar Year 2019**

Bureau	Structure Fire	Rubbish Fire	Auto Fire	Fire Out	Brush/Grass	Trees
OCB	1,077	4,981	657	94	208	174
OVB	1,269	2,996	1,016	133	371	215
OSB	1,185	3,236	962	103	82	169
OWB	607	1,751	386	80	103	88
Total	4,138	12,964	3,021	410	764	646

#### **Calendar Year 2020**

Bureau	Structure Fire	Rubbish Fire	Auto Fire	Fire Out	Brush/Grass	Trees
OCB	1,029	7,318	754	111	244	278
OVB	1,165	4,652	995	151	483	323
OSB	1,187	5,115	1,210	125	93	277
OWB	621	2,586	424	75	127	120
TOTAL	4,002	19,671	3,383	462	947	998

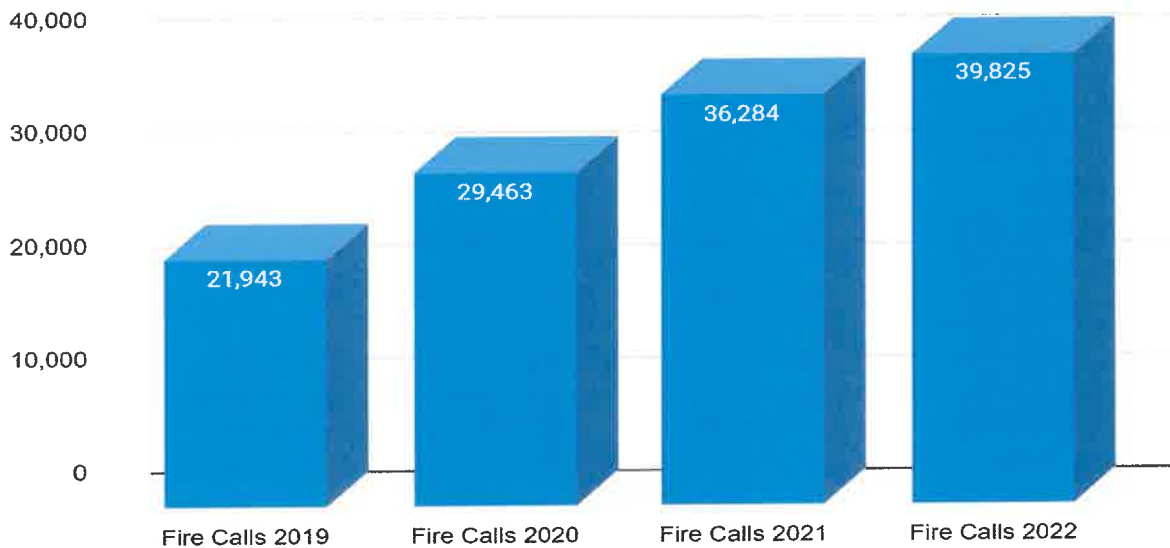
#### **Calendar Year 2021**

Bureau	Structure Fire	Rubbish Fire	Auto Fire	Fire Out	Brush/Grass	Trees
OCB	1,068	9,775	780	100	175	309
OVB	1,133	6,525	1,101	140	263	306
OSB	1,176	6,928	1,301	102	97	246
OWB	547	3,553	373	84	104	98
TOTAL	3,924	26,781	3,555	426	639	959

#### **Calendar Year 2022**

Bureau	Structure Fire	Rubbish Fire	Auto Fire	Fire Out	Brush/Grass	Trees
OCB	1,276	10,787	824	108	182	374
OVB	1,173	7,807	1,191	112	357	301
OSB	1,209	7,377	1,202	97	87	250
OWB	581	3,817	405	74	73	146
TOTAL	4,241	29,801	3,622	391	699	1,071

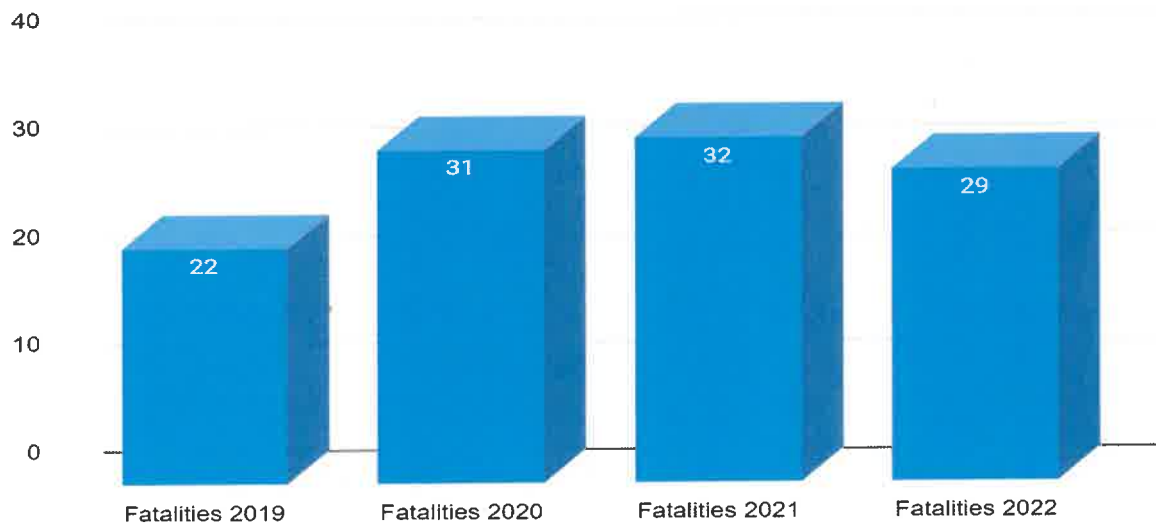
Fire Calls from 2019 through 2022



### FATALITIES

This statistic includes intentional, accidental, and undetermined fires. This breakdown does not focus on issues such as homicide or crime cover-ups; instead, it outlines the type of fires in which fire fatalities were discovered during suppression operations or persons who succumbed to their burn injuries at a later day.

Fatalities



Of the 29 fatalities for 2022, 15 were from structure fires, two from auto fires, five from rubbish fires, and seven were classified as "other," including burns and medical runs. The fatalities were broken down into the following charts per bureau.

## Count



## ARRESTS

### Bureau



Arson investigators are California peace officers, as outlined in California Penal Code Section 830.37, with powers of arrest throughout the state. The majority of ACTS arrests were made based on CA Penal Code Sections 451 through 457.1, which legally define the crimes of arson as felonies.

In 2022, the Arson Section made 164 arrests. Of the arrests, 109 (66.5%) were from People Experiencing Homelessness (PEH). The 2022 Arrests were broken down into the following chart by the four bureaus.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Arson Counter Terrorism Section strives tirelessly to provide thorough, competent, and complete investigations. Section members pour their hearts into their jobs, and the product they produce speaks volumes to their knowledge and abilities. We look to continue improving and expanding the Section as the ACTS progresses. With the help of the Fire Commission, Fire Chief, UFLAC and Command Staff, the ACTS will continue to be a premier fire investigation entity.

Board Report prepared by Battalion Chief David Reddix, Arson Counter-Terrorism Section.

Attachment



# Los Angeles Fire Department's Arson / Counter-Terrorism Section ACTS



Presented by  
Arson Battalion Chief David Reddix  
September 5, 2023

# Los Angeles Fire Department Arson Section

- The Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section (known as "ACTS") was originally established in 1918 and was known as the "Arson Squad."
- All Investigators are Peace Officers under 830.37 of the California Penal Code.



# Arson Section Responsibilities

- The Los Angeles City Charter gives the LAFD the authority to investigate fires within the City of Los Angeles
  - Criminal and non-criminal fires are investigated by LAFD ACTS (Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section) Investigators.
  - The Arson Section is responsible for preventing, enforcing, and prosecuting arson crimes.
  - Arson related homicide cases: Los Angeles Police Department will be the lead agency, and LAFD Arson will provide fire investigative expertise.

# Arson Section Responsibilities

- As per the LAFD Manual of Operation, the primary responsibility for determining the most probable cause of the fire rests with the Incident Commander. 2/1-63.01
- The Incident Commander, at their discretion, can utilize the Arson Section to assist in fire cause determination.



# ACTS Locations

- ACTS Headquarters
  - ▣ 1700 Stadium Way, #109  
Los Angeles CA 90012
  - ▣ Phone Numbers
    - Office: 213-893-9800
- Arson Unit 1
  - ▣ Fire Station 17
    - 1601 S. Santa Fe Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90021
  - ▣ Phone Numbers
    - Office: 213-485-9798



# ACTS Staffing

- Arson Command staff:
  - Battalion Chief (40 Hr)
  - Captain II (40 Hr)
  - Captain I (40 Hr)
- 19 Arson Investigators position
  - 2 Senior Arson Investigator (40 Hr)
  - 1 K-9 handler/Investigator (40 Hr)
  - 10 Investigators assigned to special duty for long-term/complex investigations (40 Hr)
  - 6 Investigators for platoon duty coverage (A-Unit 1)
- 1 Civilian support staff
- 1 Alcohol Tobacco & Firearms Special Agent (ATF)
- 1 Forensic Photographer





# Current & Future Staffing

- Current staffing:
  - 13 Investigators / 5 years or more of investigative experience
  - 5 Investigators / 6 months or less of investigative experience
- Future staffing
  - Retiring personnel
    - 2 Investigators retiring at the end of September 2023
    - 1 Investigator retiring at the end of January 2024
  - Personnel replacement plan
    - Initiate the investigator testing process immediately to have a certified list by mid-January 2023



# ACTS Investigators

- Rank of Firefighter III
- Peace Officers
- Armed
- Follow LAPD policies regarding weapons and uses of force.
- Work either 24-hour platoon duty or 4-10 special duty schedule





# Acts Diversity

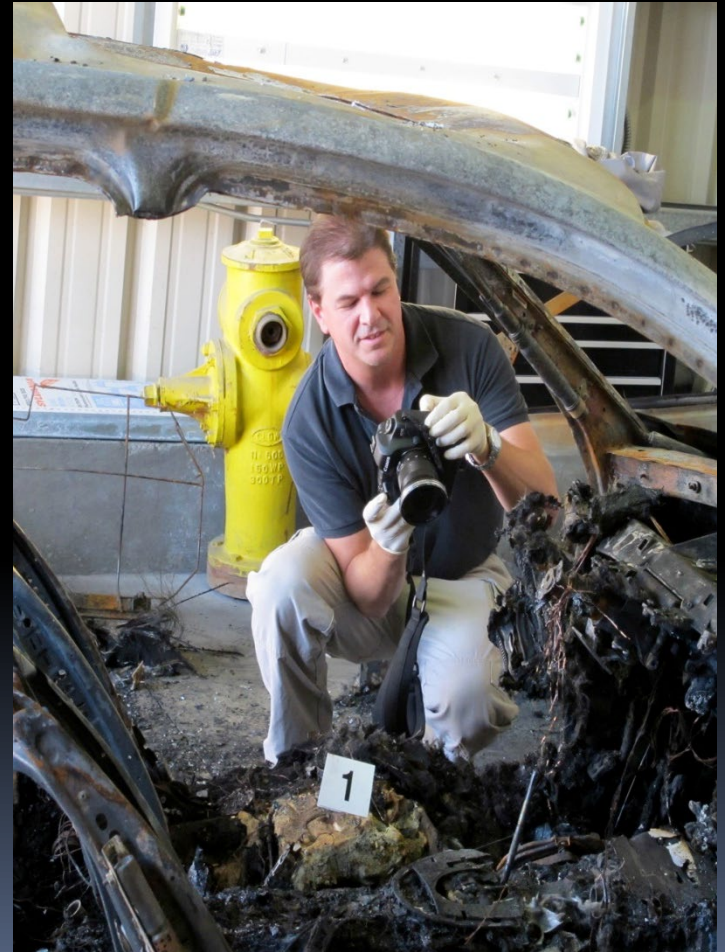
- Male & female investigators
- Hispanic, African American, White & Asian
- Bilingual
- Military
- Reserve LAPD
- Reserve San Fernando PD
- Higher education ranges from an AA to a Master's degree.



# Forensic/Documentation Photographer

## “Photo 1”

- Dedicated contract employee.
- Receives ACT Staff requests and attaches via radio or phone call to MFC.
- He is sometimes requested to respond to significant incidents with no arson component, but documentation is needed for the LAFD.
- Maintains an extensive database of images at the ACTS Office organized by date, incident number, incident type, etc.



# Arson K-9

- “Panthera”
  - Panthera is an accelerant detection K-9
- Black Lab
- 1-1/2 Years Old
- Panthera is an ATF K-9 assigned to the House of Worship Task Force
- A resource utilized by the A-Units.
- Provides local agency assistance
- National Response Team K-9
  - Panthera is the Western Response K-9
  - Areas covered include Southern CA, AZ, NM, NV, HI, Guam





# Types of fire investigations

## Major Emergencies



# Types of fire investigations

## Explosions

