



South Carolina State NFIRS Program Standard Operating Guide

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Introduction

This Standard Operating Guide is a working document to ensure that all fire departments in South Carolina are complying with State standards in regards to incident reporting. The goal of this guide and the SC State NFIRS Program is to ensure that incident reports and the data entered within them is of the highest quality to be used for analysis for years to come. Local departments are expected to adhere to national and statewide standards and implement department-wide standards for uniform reporting.

Terms and Definitions

- **NFIRS**- National Fire Incident Reporting System; a uniform standard for reporting incidents to which fire departments respond
- **FDID**- fire department identification (number); a unique identifier for each fire department participating in NFIRS and SC State NFIRS
- **Incident report**- an NFIRS-standard form completed to inform what happened during a call responded to by a fire department
- **Data**- observable facts collected for the purpose of completing an incident report
- **Software**- a means to inputting data into an incident report; can be either NFIRS' Data Entry Tool (Client Tool), the NFIRS website, or an approved third-party vendor's software

NFIRS and SC State NFIRS

- NFIRS is the national standard for incident reporting by all fire departments. It represents the overall picture and the minimum of what needs to be collected. Additionally, it provides a database for all the information that fire departments collect.
- SC State NFIRS is South Carolina's statewide standard and program for incident reporting by all qualified fire departments within the state. It covers the collection of data, the submission of reports, the standard of quality assurance, the analysis of the data, and the associated training related to all of it.



Participants

Fire Department Qualifications

- A fire department is expected to participate in the SC State NFIRS Program if it meets the following qualifications:
 - It is the primary response agency for fires in a specific jurisdiction;
 - Its jurisdiction does not overlap with another fire department's jurisdiction;
 - And it does not report to another State (or other jurisdiction's) NFIRS agency.
- A fire department who meets these qualifications will have its own FDID within the system.
 - This FDID is also used for the SC Fire Academy Fire Portal.
 - An FDID removed from the NFIRS system will not be removed from the Fire Academy Fire Portal.
- A fire department may fall under the purview of a countywide fire district which is responsible for the reporting of more than one department.
 - In this case, an FDID may be assigned to the district rather than each fire department within that district.
- A fire department that does not meet the qualifications in the first bullet point is not expected to participate in SC State NFIRS.
 - Some examples of these departments are:
 - HAZMAT,
 - Rescue teams called in as mutual aid only,
 - Department of Defense,
 - Headquarters,
 - Emergency Medical Service only departments,
 - And consolidated departments now under the purview of a reporting fire department.

Roles within State NFIRS

	Definition	Responsibilities
State Program Manager	The State Program Manager is the liaison and point of contact between local departments and FEMA/USFA at the national level. They oversee all local departments, correcting issues that occur and analyzing the State's fire problem(s). The State Program Manager works with others to educate the public, analyze collected data, and improve data collection protocols for departments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controls system administration tasks, such as user name and password creation. • Checks for quality in submitted incident reports. • Provides materials to assist in the download of USFA software and reference guides. • Trains departments to collect data and correct errors per the standards set forth nationally and statewide. • Ensures that updates are made statewide. • Troubleshoots technological and reporting issues as requested. • Ensures that incident reports are submitted to the NFIRS national database in a timely manner.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports technological and reporting issues on an as-needed basis to FEMA/USFA. • Provides status updates and data analysis as necessary to the Office of State Fire Marshal, fire departments in the state, FEMA/USFA, and the public.
Local Program Manager	<p>A local program manager is the overseer of the NFIRS program within one or more departments. They are the point of contact for any NFIRS-related communications between the State Program Manager and the department. The administrator is a manager, overseeing and training those end users reporting to her/him.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serves as lead administrator of the local NFIRS program. • Provides a means for their end users to collect data during and after the incident. • Implements the goals of the local program. • Focuses on report quality and data usage, especially for community risk reduction. • Analyzes data and incident reports to keep a pulse on the local fire/incident problem.
Administrator	<p>An administrator ensures end users meet the expectations of the local NFIRS program. They are responsible for quality control, data sharing, and training end users. Administrators may choose to analyze data for their department as well.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides quality control of all data and incident reports. • Motivates end users to complete reports. • Trains end users regularly to ensure compliance with local, state, and national standards. • Submits incident reports to the NFIRS national database in a timely manner. • Reports issues on an as-needed basis to the State Program Manager.
End User	<p>An end user is an individual who collects data at or after an incident, and/or an individual who enters reports into an approved software. The end user reports to the administrator in their department, unless both roles are covered by the same person, and they are expected to follow the guidelines set forth nationally, statewide, and locally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collects data at every incident they attend, using department standards set-up by the administrator. • Creates an incident report for every call. • Understands the purpose of accurate and timely data collection for the State. • Attends trainings as required by the administrator and/or State Program Manager.



Expectations Incident Reports

- Incident reports should be considered public record and are not considered legal documents.
- An incident report is created by a local NFIRS program, and thus all ownership of the report remains at the local level.
- SC State NFIRS cannot attest to the truth of the matter within any report.
- Local NFIRS programs are permitted to redact information in order to protect sensitive information within a report.

Data Quality

- Data collected by fire service personnel, either during or after the incident, is expected to be of the highest quality.
- Data entered into an incident report should be done in such a way that each report is marked valid by NFIRS.

Completion of Incident Reports

- Any call that is dispatched for the fire department to respond must have an associated incident report, including any mutual aid given.
 - For “canceled en route” calls, a 611 incident type code should be used.
 - Incidents occurring during training or exercise should not be documented, with the exception of any fire service injury or fatality that occurred during that training or exercise.
 - The following situations are strongly encouraged by the State to have an incident report completed. However, a local department can decide if these calls are to be documented.
 - A call for mutual aid in which the responding agency is canceled en route or not given a task. (Incident Type Code 611; Mutual Aid Code N)
 - Public education. (Incident Type Code 553)
 - Installation of smoke alarms, including a blitz. (Incident Type Code 553)
 - Medical calls in which no fire apparatus responded to the incident. (Incident Type Category 300s)
 - Fire service fatalities (for any incident type) and civilian fatalities (for fire-related incidents only) must be reported promptly to the Office of the State Fire Marshal.
- Incident reports and the data within should have these elements.
 - **Completeness-** In order to obtain the complete picture, reports should be done beyond the minimum standards set forth nationally. Incident reports should be completed at the minimum to validity.
 - **Accuracy-** The data is truthful at the time it is entered. End users should use facts to complete each data entry field in the report.
 - If there are data entry fields for which a reasonable conclusion cannot be determined, the administrator should direct the end user to input “unknown” or “undetermined,” or a similar wording.
 - The use of “unknown” and “undetermined” and similar wording should be used sparingly.



- Reports should be updated in order to reflect the most accurate information available.
- **Reliability-** The data should be entered the same way each time in a report, and the report should be completed the same way each time. Both the data and the report should adhere to national, state, and local standards.
- **Timeliness-** The report should be completed as soon as possible to avoid data becoming inaccurate or missing.
- Incident reports should be entered using NFIRS-approved software only. Approved vendors can be found on the NFIRS website.

Submission of Incident Reports

- Incident reports must be submitted to the national database by the fifteenth of the following month. (example: July 1 to 31 incident reports are due August 15.)
- Incident reports will be released annually by the deadline set forth at the national level. Released data can only be updated/changed/deleted by notifying the State Program Manager.
- All incident reports from the previous calendar year will only be accepted until June 1 of the following year in order to be a part of national data analysis. (example: All remaining 2015 data is due June 1, 2016.) Incident reports can be entered after this deadline, with the caveat they may not be included in national data analysis.
- Any issues with submissions should be reported to the State Program Manager as soon as possible.

Updating Incident Reports

- Incident reports should be updated as soon as new data becomes available.
- Incident reports can be updated until the point that the data becomes released. If a report is released and must be updated, the local program manager should contact the State Program Manager to unlock the incident.

Quality Assurance/Quality Control of Incident Reports

- SC State NFIRS Program expects that the administrators look for the following in their reports to ensure quality of the highest caliber:
 - Validity, per the NFIRS standard
 - Narrative present
 - Is the narrative written in complete sentences, with no spelling and grammar errors?
 - Is there no jargon, abbreviations, or complicated language that may confuse later readers?
 - Is there no identifying information that can compromise privacy or security?
 - Does the narrative describe:
 - Why the department was called?
 - What the responders observed when they arrived to the scene?
 - What the responders did to resolve the incident?



- What the responders did to clear the scene? (Transport the patient, turn over the scene, return to the station, etc.)
- Everything that was unusual about the scene, including information that cannot be put into specific data entry fields?
- A lack of data entry errors
 - Common data entry errors include:
 - Narratives not matching the incident
 - Incident types and action taken not matching
 - Actions taken do not reflect the three most important actions taken during the incident
 - Incomplete or mismatching non-required modules which do not correlate to the basic module
 - Injuries are not updated to fatalities when appropriate
 - Incident types are not specific, such as having 100-series codes
 - Too many unknowns/others throughout the report
 - These entry errors are not the only errors possible, so administrators should ensure that their department's incident reports are correct throughout.
- Signature of end user, the name of the person who actually wrote the report.
- Local departments may have more stringent requirements for their data and reports.

Local/Department Standard Operating Guide

- Administrators in each department should work together to create a standard operating guide for data collecting and report writing.
- This guide should be used for training end users and administrators so that all the data and reports are consistent locally.
- See Appendix A for some questions to guide your SOG.
- A local SOG template is made available by the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Training

- All administrators and end users should be formally trained so they are familiar with inputting incident reports per the standards set forth nationally, statewide, and locally.
- Training and re-education should happen regularly in order to ensure compliance with all standards.
- South Carolina State Fire shall sponsor training which is accessible and free.

Public Interactions

- Freedom of Information Act requests are to be handled at the local level, when possible.
 - Any FOIA requests should not include personally identifiable information.
- Data analysis can be done for the public by the administrators.
 - If an administrator needs additional data, such as statewide comparisons, they can contact the State Program Manager.



Interpretation of Select Data Entry Fields in Certain Modules

- Basic Module (always required)
 - All NFIRS data entry fields which are mandatory at the national level are required for any report entered by local departments in South Carolina..
 - B. Street- Put only the street name in this box. Put the street type in the box after this.
 - For incidents at an intersection, put only one street name in the *Street* field, and put the other street in the *Cross Street/Directions* field. It is up to local departments to decide which street goes into which field.
 - C. Incident Type- Ensure that you are recording all incidents, not just fires.
 - E1. Times- All times must have seconds recorded.
 - E1. Controlled Date & Controlled Time- Mandatory (NFIRS) for Wildland fires, Required (SC State) for all fires; for non-fire incidents, leave blank
 - E2. District- Optional. If you are using this, enter the identifier for the fire department district in which the incident occurred.
 - G1. Resources- Required unless you are using an Apparatus/Resource/Personnel module. Suppression is for only those vehicles which can suppress fires. EMS is for only those vehicles which are for patient care but not suppression. Other units are for POV and any other vehicles for which Suppression or EMS does not fit. Personnel should be counted as those who were on/in the vehicle when it arrived at the incident.
 - G2. Estimated Dollar Losses & Values. Required (NFIRS) for all fires, recommended for all incidents in which there was a dollar loss. Pre-incident values are required (SC State) for all fires, regardless if there was a loss. The use of \$0 value/loss should be used only for situations where the value was truly \$0. This field should not be left blank.
 - H1. Casualties- All departments should report their own fire service injuries/fatalities. Only civilian injuries and fatalities should be reported if they are related to a fire incident (100 series codes). If the civilian injury or fatality is not related to a fire incident, you do not have to record it (SC State).
 - H2. Detector- This is used for confined fires. If the fire left the container, ensure that this field matches the detector alerted field in the Fire Module. Do not use for any other type of incident.
 - J. Property Use- Use code 419 for mobile homes that are primary residences.
 - K1. K2. Person/Entity Involved/Owner- Use this section for witnesses, individuals involved (for insurance purposes), or those who own the property. Do not enter personally identifying information here, especially if this is a medical call.
 - L. Remarks- Also called "the narrative". Do not put personally identifying information here (unless there is a fire casualty). Put any information here that you cannot find a place for in the incident report. Required for all incidents (SC State).
 - M. Authorization- Required (SC State) for all data entry fields.
- Fire Module (required for all fires not coded as Incident Types 113-118; can use the Wildland Fire Module instead for outdoor fires).



- Structure Fire Module (required for all fires that were not contained and fall under Incident Types 111, 112, 120-123).
- Civilian Fire Casualty Module (required for any injury during a fire incident, required for any fatality in which the fire was the primary cause of the fatal injury).
- Fire Service Casualty (required for any injury or fatality of fire service personnel during any incident in which the fire person was on duty- including while at the station).
- EMS Module (not required or recommended). Use this module only if the fire department was the primary care provider for the patient during the incident, in addition to carrying out the duties expected of the fire department, and the patient survived the incident. The patient described in this module was not involved in a fire incident. This module should not be used in absence of any NEMSIS approved software.
- Hazmat Module (required/recommended for specific incident types). Use this module only if the incident released a significant amount of hazardous materials into the environment.
- Wildland Fire Module (required/recommended for specific incident types). Use this module for Incident Types 140, 141, 142, 143, 160, 170, 171, 172, 173, 561, 631, 632. Do not additionally complete the Fire Module if you use the Wildland Fire Module.
- Apparatus/Resource/Personnel Modules (recommended). Use this module to record who or what was on a scene.
- Arson/Juvenile Firesetter Module (recommended). Use this module if you suspect the fire was intentionally set. This module may also be used if you wish to record an investigation happened, regardless of the outcome of said investigation.

Appendix A: Questions to Guide Implementation of the Department SOG

- Who puts in reports?
- How long after an incident does a report get entered?
- Who QC's the reports?
- How do you ensure that reports are valid?
- What is the department criteria for certain entries?
- What is the department criteria for narratives?
- Who trains the new end users?
- What is the schedule for training end users?
- Who collects data at a scene?
- How do they collect that data?
- How do you decide on entries that don't have a SOG but need one?
- How does your department interpret the optional/recommended data entry fields?