



PARALEGAL'S GUIDE TO FINDING A FIRE INVESTIGATOR

**TIPS FOR MAKING YOU & YOUR BOSS
LOOK LIKE GENIUSES!**



CONTENTS

INSPECTOR, INVESTIGATOR OR EXPERT?	3
GOOGLE SEARCH TERMS	4
WIDEN YOUR SEARCH	5
BASIC FIRE VOCAB	6
WHY CALL?	8
BEFORE YOU CALL	9
???’S THE FIRE INVESTIGATOR MIGHT ASK	10
PUTTING THE FIRE INVESTIGATOR IN THE HOT SEAT	12
HOW DID IT GO?? EVAULATING THE CALL	16
PRINTABLE: EXPERT INQUIRY FORM	17



SEARCH FOR THE RIGHT PRO. INSPECTOR, INVESTIGATOR OR EXPERT?

Fire Inspector, Fire Investigator and Fire Expert are not synonyms. Make your search more efficient by asking for the right type of fire professional for your case.

FIRE INSPECTOR: Is, usually, employed by a public agency to enforce fire safety codes and standards in the community by inspecting buildings for fire code violations, conducting fire drills, examining fire protection systems, among other duties.

FIRE INVESTIGATOR: A professional, working for a public agency, insurance company or private firm who, through use of specialized training and scientific knowledge, seeks to find the origin and, often, the cause of a fire or explosion after the event. Also called a C&O or O&C investigators.

FIRE EXPERT: A fire investigator, usually working for a private firm, who possesses additional skills and technical knowledge to extend the determination of a fire or explosion's origin to find both the cause of the fire and the party that bears responsibility for the event. They possess the requisite scientific, analytic, and communication skills to relay those findings and render opinions in expert reports, assist with litigation, and provide expert testimony in legal proceedings. These professionals have had their credentials recognized by the courts for their expertise.

FINDING A FIRE EXPERT WHERE TO LOOK

Finding a highly qualified fire & explosion investigator is easy if you know where to look.

Search engines, like Google or Bing, are a great place to start your search. The best fire investigation company websites showcase the expert that will work on and testify in your case. Remember, you're not selecting the "company" but rather interviewing the expert that will bring your message to the judge & jury. Expert witness directories let you source many subject matter experts at once.



EXPERT WITNESS DIRECTORIES

- expertpages.com
- almexperts.com
- lawsonline.com
- lexvisio.com

FEE-BASED EXPERT SEARCH AND REFERRAL SERVICES (PAID).

- expertinstitute.com
- expertservices.com
- hgexperts.com

SUGGESTED SEARCH TERMS

FIRE INVESTIGATION SEARCH

- fire expert witness
- fire & explosion investigation
- cause & origin expert
- origin & cause expert
- independent fire expert
- fire investigation companies
- fire investigators near me
- fire investigation expert
- top fire investigation company
- [your type of fire] fire investigation expert
- fire investigation expert [your state]

EXPLOSION INVESTIGATION SEARCH

- explosion expert
- explosion expert witness
- explosion investigation expert
- explosion investigation companies near me
- natural gas expert
- lp gas expert
- propane explosion expert
- fireworks accident expert
- top explosion investigation company
- [your type of case] explosion expert
- explosion expert [your state]



WIDEN YOUR SEARCH: WHY A “LOCAL” EXPERT ISN’T ALWAYS THE BEST CHOICE

Looking for a Local Expert? Listen, Fire investigation is niche expertise. There just aren’t that many fire investigation companies out there. Limiting your search to only fire and explosion experts in your geographic area significantly narrows the pool of qualified experts. It also increases the chance that when you find a good fit, they’re already conflicted out.

The best fire experts work on cases that fit their expertise, wherever they are needed.

A local expert might not always cost less.

Huh? Why would you say this? We know it sounds counterintuitive but here’s a few of reasons why this can be true.

First, expertise counts. A more experienced, national expert may have already seen a case similar to yours and can get to the root of your case faster, saving you money along the way. Experienced experts have a track record of writing reports that make your case. A local, less litigation-savvy expert may not be able to make the same impact.

Second, What about the travel costs? It’s true, there will be travel costs, but a responsible expert will take steps to minimize case expenses by combining trips for multiple clients, scheduling scenes and inspections in one trip whenever possible. Watch out for companies who charge less per hour but require additional experts and multiple inspections.

Remote/Zoom depositions. They’re here to stay and most experts are perfectly comfortable to testify on camera. This saves you travel expenses and time.



TALK THE TALK. BASIC FIRE VOCAB

Top 15 Fire Investigation terms you need to understand to find a competent fire expert. We'll give you the technical definition and what it means in plain english.

*Plus 2 bonus terms.

FIRE INVESTIGATION TERMS

	Plain English	NFPA 921 Official Definition & Citation
NFPA 921	The only consensus built, peer reviewed manual for fire investigation.	Produced by the National Fire Protection Association. NFPA 921, Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations is the industry standard for information, investigation methodologies and practices. (NFPA.org)
NFPA 1033	The minimum standard for a fire investigators skills and knowledge.	Produced by the National Fire Protection Association. NFPA 1033, Standard for Professional Qualifications for Fire Investigator, identifies the minimum job performance requirements necessary to serve as a public or private fire investigator.
NIFRS Report	Standard fire dept. report used for statistics. It is not considered an official fire investigation report. Also called an Incident Report.	The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NIFRS) is a voluntary reporting standard that fire departments use to uniformly report on the full range of their activities, from fire to emergency medical services to severe weather and natural disasters. (Fema.org)
Origin	The physical area where the fire began.	The general location where a fire or explosion began. (3.3.140)
Cause	The action, failure or chain of events that caused the fire or explosion to occur.	The circumstances, conditions, or agencies that brought about or resulted in the fire or explosion incident, damage to property resulting from the fire or explosion incident, or bodily injury or loss of life resulting from the fire or explosion incident. (3.3.27)
Responsibility	The person, agency or entity, through action, inaction or negligence, that is responsible for creating the conditions that lead to a fire or explosion. An assignment of blame.	The accountability of a person or other entity for the event or sequence of events that caused the fire or explosion, spread of fire, bodily injuries, loss of life, or property damage.(3.3.163)

TALK THE TALK. BASIC FIRE VOCAB

FIRE INVESTIGATION TERMS

	Plain English	NFPA 921 Official Definition & Citation
Fire	A chemical reaction that produces light and heat.	A rapid oxidation process, which is an exothermic chemical reaction, resulting in the evolution of light and heat in varying intensities. (3.3.68)
Fire Analysis	Using science and engineering to figure out where and how the fire started.	The process of determining the origin, cause, development, responsibility, and, when required, a failure analysis of a fire or explosion. (3.3.69)
Fire Dynamics	The science of how fire and smoke behave. Fire dynamics can be used to help the investigator find the origin of the fire and understand what happened during the fire event.	The detailed study of how chemistry, fire science, and the engineering disciplines of fluid mechanics and heat transfer interact to influence fire behavior. (3.3.73)
Fire Patterns	Marks left behind by the fire.	The visible or measurable physical changes, or identifiable shapes, formed by a fire effect or group of fire effects. (3.3.78)
Competent Ignition Source	Sources, within the area of origin, that have high enough temperature and enough energy to cause a fire or explosion.	An ignition source that has sufficient energy and is capable of transferring that energy to the fuel long enough to raise the fuel to its ignition temperature. (3.3.37)
Ignition Sequence	Sequence of events, actions or failures that led to the fire or explosion.	A fuel by itself or an ignition source by itself does not create a fire. Fire results from the combination of fuel, an oxidant, and the ignition source. The investigator's description of events, including the ignition sequence, (the factors that allowed the ignition source, fuel and oxidant to react) can help establish the fire cause. (19.1.5)
Explosion	Rapid expansion of gases under pressure that moves things around. Expansion can be the result of combustion or the release of pressurized gases.	This sudden conversion of potential energy (chemical or mechanical) into kinetic energy with the production and release of gases under pressure, or the release of gas under pressure. These highpressure gases then do mechanical work such as moving, changing, or shattering nearby materials. (3.3.44)

WHY CALL RATHER THAN EMAIL?

Phone calls don't get lost in a SPAM folder. You get an immediate feel for the firm and the expert. It's more time efficient. Most expert inquiry calls only take 10-15 minutes & provide much more information than an email.



WHEN SELECTING AN EXPERT,
THERE'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR A
1-ON-1 CONVERSATION. PAPER
CREDENTIALS ONLY TELL HALF
THE STORY.

THE ONLY WAY TO JUDGE
AN EXPERT'S ABILITY TO
COMMUNICATE & CONNECT IS TO
TALK WITH THEM.

GET IT IN WRITING

Ask the expert to email you their CV (any anyone else who will be working on your case), retainer agreement, and rate schedule.

They should arrive in a timely manner. Are these materials professional, up-to-date and without errors? The rates & retainer amount in the agreement should match what was discussed.



BEFORE MAKING THE CALL

- * GATHER AS MUCH INFORMATION AS YOU CAN ABOUT THE INCIDENT. DATE, PARTIES INVOLVED, WHAT KIND OF LOSS, ETC...
- * DETERMINE WHETHER SUIT HAS ALREADY BEEN FILED.
- * DATES FOR SCHEDULED INSPECTIONS OR DEADLINES.
- * DETERMINE YOUR ROUGH BUDGET FOR EXPERT RATES AND RETAINERS.
- * REVIEW THE EXPERT'S WEBSITE & JOT DOWN ANY QUESTIONS THAT COME TO MIND.





IT'S OKAY NOT
TO KNOW THE
ANSWERS TO
THESE QUESTIONS.

BUT THE MORE
YOU KNOW GOING
IN THE EASIER IT
WILL BE TO FIND
THE RIGHT EXPERT
FOR YOUR CASE.

BURNING QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS THE FIRE INVESTIGATOR MIGHT ASK YOU. *

1. What can you tell me about what happened?
2. What type of incident is it? Fire, Explosion, Both, Other?
3. What was the date of the incident?
4. What city & state was the incident? On what date?
5. Were there injuries, deaths or just property damage?
6. Who do you represent? Is the case in civil (state or federal) or criminal court?

*& WHY THEY'RE ASKING

Question 1: This helps the expert determine whether your case falls in their area of expertise. Some fire investigators prefer to limit their cases to a particular size of loss, type of fire or explosion.

Questions 1-6: aka "the mini conflict check." Why waste everyone's time, not to mention create potential issues, when a few quick details can reveal a conflict?

MORE ?'S THE FIRE INVESTIGATOR MIGHT ASK.

- 
7. What's the approximate value of the loss?
 8. What kind of structures were involved?
 9. Have any previous investigations been conducted by the insurance company, the other side or previous counsel?
 10. Are there any photos, witness statements, videos, police or fire reports available?
 11. If products are suspected to be involved, what are they?
 12. Is the fire or explosion scene still available?
 13. Are there any upcoming inspections?
 14. What stage of the case are you in? Has a suit been filed?
 15. Are there any quick deadlines I need to know about?



???

**PUT THEM IN THE HOT SEAT.
NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO
ASK THE QUESTIONS.**

Ready?

We've prepared a list of suggested questions to help you evaluate potential experts. Ask your attorney if they have any specific questions they need you to add to this list.

Don't be afraid to add follow-up questions to the discussion.



CASE DISCUSSION ??

1. What happens in a fire or explosion like this?
2. Why could this have happened?
3. Have you handled other cases like this?
4. How would you approach this investigation? What is the first step?
5. Explain (some aspect of this case) to me.
6. What are the positive aspects of the case?
7. Is this the kind of case you enjoy working on?
8. Do you see any potential pitfalls?

QUALIFICATIONS & EXPERIENCE ??

9. How does your expertise apply to our case?
10. What makes you the best expert for this case?
11. What is your background...work experience, training, education?
12. Tell me about your qualifications.
13. Have you worked/testified in (insert your state, city, country)?
14. How many times have you testified?
15. Have you ever been excluded or limited from testifying?
16. How often do you work for Plaintiffs v. Defense?
17. Will you be the expert handling our case?
18. Will the investigator doing the scene and legwork be the testifying expert?
19. Do you think you will need to bring in additional expertise & do you have someone you use in these types of cases?





20.What information do you need to run a conflict check?

What's your company's conflict policy?

21.What's your current availability?

22.What are your hourly rates for this type of case?

23.Do you require a retainer and how does it work?

24.Where are you located & what are your travel policies?

25.Can I set up a conference call between you and the attorney handling the case?

**RATES, RETENTION
& LOGISTICS ??**

15



HOW DID IT GO?

EVALUATING THE CALL

ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS BEFORE MAKING A FINAL RECOMMENDATION.

If they weren't in the office, did they call you within a reasonable amount of time.?

Did the expert seem engaged and interested?

Were they friendly and helpful?

Did you learn something you didn't know during the call?

Did they take the time to explain any technical details in plain english?

Did the expert seem to understand the case and your objectives?

Did they clearly explain the retention process?

Did they seem confident they'll be able to make the schedule work?

WATCH OUT FOR RED FLAGS

Talks more about themselves than asks questions about the case.

Only wants to speak to the attorney.

Won't look at a fire report or a few photos before taking the case to confirm they can help.

Asks for a high retainer. It might be a sign they don't want the case.

They disparaged or spoke badly about another expert or professional.



FIRE INVESTIGATOR SEARCH EXPERT EVALUATION



CASE INFORMATION

Our Matter	
Incident Date	____/____/____
Incident Type	Fire ☐ Explosion ☐ Both ☐ Other ☐ Unk ☐
Damages	Property ☐ Injury ☐ Death ☐ Other ☐
Source	Search ☐ Referral ☐ Website ☐ Other ☐
Call Date	____/____/____
CV Rec'd	
Atty. Call Booked	____/____/____ ____am/pm

Notes on Case Discussion:

EXPERT INFORMATION

Company Name	
Spoke With	
Website	
Expert Name	
# Cases Total	
# Similiar Cases	
% Parties Represented	Plaintiff ____% Defense ____% Other ____%
Availability	
Conflict	No ☐ Check Pending ☐ Yes ☐
Rates	
Retainer Amount:	

Notes on Qualifications/Experience:

Notes on Rates, Retention & Logistics:



**ENJOY THAT FEELING WHEN
YOU'VE FOUND THE RIGHT EXPERT
FOR YOUR CASE**

BONUS TIP:

**MAKE YOUR SEARCH FOR A FIRE EXPERT EASY.
CALL MEIER FIRE FIRST.**



RICHARD MEIER - 941-900-1234

WHEN YOU SEE ASHES...WE SEE ANSWERS