

Fire Investigator Accident and Near-Miss Reporting Program

For fire investigators, almost every fire scene examination is an exposure to potentially cancer-causing toxins. Several years ago, the International Association of Arson Investigators' Health & Safety Committee worked with the University of Miami's Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center to adapt their Personal Exposure Reporter data collection tool, developed as part of Florida's Firefighter Cancer Initiative, to include fire investigators so we can document our fire scene exposures. "The risks associated with fire investigation work have typically drawn less attention than risks for peers who fight fires directly, making fire investigators an underserved population," says IAAI president Randy Watson. "In the 2000s, we began to notice that many in our industry were developing cancer and dying. It took a while for us to wake up and see the connection with what we did."

In a collaborative effort between the University of Miami and the IAAI Health & Safety Committee, the Personal Exposure Reporter has recently been expanded to collect accident and near-miss information. We all understand what an accident is, but near-misses are those things that, under slightly different circumstances, may have been an accident. Therefore, near-miss incidents provide valuable information we can learn from in addition to accidents. Understanding how and why accidents and near-miss events occur helps everyone learn and improve.

"To the best of our knowledge, there's no other tool that captures this accident and near-miss information for the fire investigator population," said Jeff Pauley, Chairman of the IAAI's Health & Safety Committee. "If we don't mitigate workplace risks, there's a real cost, from insurance rates going up and legal expenses to lost wages that can adversely affect the investigator's family and employer."

The IAAI encourages all fire investigators to use the Personal Exposure Reporter to record all fire scene exposures and to report any accident and near-miss situations. Reports can be completed in as little as three to four minutes. Accidents and near-misses are among the great unknowns in fire investigations because there has not been a way to capture this information as an industry until now. This program aims to encourage the voluntary reporting of these occurrences to provide information that can be used to increase fire investigators' health and safety.

The exposure information is for the investigator's use only and is not available to anyone else. When reporting accident or near-miss information, the submitting fire investigator must affirmatively indicate their willingness to share the information with the IAAI for us to collect that data. The non-identifiable reports generated by the data submitted will be summarized into knowledge points that will help to understand the issues, provide more reliable statistics to inform policymaking and determine training gaps.

Here's what fire investigators need to know:

- Fire scene exposures and accidents or near-misses can be reported using the free Personal Exposure Reporter website <https://per.miami.edu> or searching for the Personal Exposure

Reporter in your app store to use on your mobile device. Both can be used with your user account. Be sure to select Investigator in the Employment Information section when setting up your profile. There are other choices, but those will not let you share the accident and near-miss information with the IAAI.

- It doesn't matter when the accident or near-miss occurred. Reporting past incidents will help build the database of information.
- All data are held in the University of Miami's secure database. No user- or employer-identifiable information is stored with the reports or shared with the IAAI.

Questions concerning the accident and near-miss reporting program may be directed to iaai-safety@firearson.com

