

# NFIRS

National

Fire

Incident

Reporting

System

# Coding Questions

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**FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
UNITED STATES FIRE ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL FIRE DATA CENTER**

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## NFIRS 1: Basic Module

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### GENERAL QUESTIONS

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**Question:** If a fire department is cancelled while en-route to an incident (Incident type 611), does the entire Basic Module have to be completed?

**Answer:** It is not necessary to complete blocks G2, H2, H3, I and J.

**Question:** Should incident reports be generated for a fire department training exercises?

**Answer:** Incident reports should not be submitted for training exercises unless there is a fire service casualty at the training exercise. The Fire Service Casualty Module is used to all report injuries, deaths, or exposures to fire service personnel even when they weren't directly responding to an incident. In order to do this however, you do need to create an EMS incident in the system and treat it as if the same department with the injuries responded to the EMS. The reason for this is that NFIRS is an incident based system and without establishing an incident response, the injuries can not be captured.

**Question:** A fire department sets up a temporary substation in a remote area because the area is cut off by a rockslide on the main road. It is staffed with apparatus on a full time basis for two months. Should this be a single incident?

**Answer:** This scenario should not be tracked as an incident.

**Question:** If a fire department provides mutual aid on a wildland fire and the fire lasts for seven days, but the department is called out each day and returns to quarters that same day, does the department need to complete an incident report for each day? It appears that the man hours would be greatly increased if they complete one report using the arrival date/time of the first day and the controlled date/time when in actuality, they were not there the entire duration of the fire. They may have assisted for 10 hours each day, but were not on scene the entire time.

**Answer:** In the case cited, a department would have to rely on the Apparatus/Personnel module for an accurate account of the resources/hours used for the incident. The total amount of time (manpower) and resources spent on these long term fires could be documented since the Apparatus/Personnel module allows multiple entries per resource

for the same incident. If the department doesn't use the Apparatus/Resource module, they will not be able to accurately judge that the amount of resources and hours for these types of incidents.

**Question:** The Student Manual (page SM 1-3) states that only the Basic Module (NFIRS 1) needs be completed for small vegetation fires, but the Data Entry Tool requires the Fire Module for vegetation fires.

**Answer:** Small vegetation fires require the Fire Module.

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## EXPOSURES

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**Question:** If a single hazardous materials incident involves more than one property, how do you report the address/locations of each property. Would each of the properties be treated as exposures? For example, gasoline in ground water seeps into the basement of three homes.

**Answer:** Exposure reporting is limited to fire incidents. If it is necessary to record the address/location of each property, the Person/Entity Involved fields (Block K1 of the Basic Module or Supplemental Module) can be used.

**Question:** Heat from a fire resulted in the melting of aluminum sliding on an adjacent house. The adjacent house sustained major dollar loss. Is this an exposure? If so, what is the incident type?

**Answer:** The use of the exposure fire is limited to situations where there is actual flame damage. If the adjacent property is damaged due to water, heat, smoke, or fire control, include the damage in the main report (Exposure 000). The owner /occupant information can be captured on NFIRS Form 1S, Supplemental Report. Multiple person and entities involved can be documented on this report. The number of buildings involved should be documented in the Fire Module, Section B2.

**Question:** A vehicle catches fire on a parking ramp. Two other vehicles catch fire from the first vehicle. Are these two vehicles considered an exposure fire or, as is in the Version 5.0 manual, should you "treat similar items in a group as a single exposure", such as a fleet of cars?.

**Answer:** This is a situation that calls for some judgment. If the cars on the ramp are in a general parking facility and they each have separate individual owners, treat each as

a separate vehicle fire exposure. If, instead, a fleet of vehicles is involved and they all have the same corporate owner then they may all be treated as a single exposure.

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## DATES AND TIMES

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**Question:** If an incident does not have an arrival time or a controlled time, what should be reported?

**Answer:** If the unit is cancelled en-route, then the Arrival Time should be set to the time that the unit, or fire department, cleared. Also, in the Apparatus/Personnel Module, the arrival time for an individual unit would be the same as the cleared time if they were cancelled en-route. This is typical when the first unit arrives at the scene and can handle the situation without the need for the additional units which are cancelled en-route.

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## INCIDENT TYPE

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**Question:** What incident type would be used for a small single bush that burned outside, and which modules need to be completed?

**Answer:** This would be Incident Type 142 and would require completing of the Basic Module and the Fire Module. The “small vegetation fire” was allowed to be reported without a complete fire report in version NFIRS 4.1 but not in version 5.0.

**Question:** If specialized fire apparatus such as a hazardous materials vehicle or a fire investigation support unit is purchased on a regional basis, but stored and staffed by a local fire department within that region, how does the department responding with the specialized unit report the incident type and actions taken?

**Answer:** The incident type would be reported as the situation they responded to. The department responding with this special unit would be giving aid even though the fire department receiving the aid may be part of the region that purchased the equipment. The persons responding with the equipment would report the actions they took which might be to provide the apparatus (Action Taken 74) with someone else actually using the tools and equipment, or you may document other actions which involved using the apparatus.

**Question:** A fire department responds to a call for power lines down and on arrival and finds the wires are telephone or cable wires. What is the Incident Type?

**Answer:** The department reports based on what it finds, not what it is dispatched to. Therefore, this is a good intent call and should be coded as Good Intent, Other (600).

**Question:** Fire department A is dispatched to standby at fire department B's station based on an automatic aid agreement. Fire Department B's incident turned out to be related to an alarm system malfunction. How is the report coded?

**Answer:**

**Fire Department A's incident:**

*Incident Type = 571 – cover assignment.*

*Aid Given or received = 4 (automatic aid)*

*Action Taken = 92 (standby)*

**Fire Department B's incident:**

*Incident Type = 735 (Alarm Malfunction)*

*Aid Given or received = 2 (Automatic Aid Received)*

*Action Taken = 86 (investigate)*

**Question:** Fire Department A is dispatched to out of town incident but were cancelled in route. The incident turned out to be related to an alarm system malfunction. How is the report coded?

**Answer:**

**Fire Dept. A incident:**

*Incident Type = 611 (dispatched and cancelled en-route)*

*Actions Taken = 93 (cancelled en route)*

*Aid Given or Received = 3 (aid given)*

**Fire Dept. B's incident:**

*Incident Type = 735*

*Aid Given or received = 2*

*Action Taken = 86 (investigate)*

**Question:** Should we use code "621 - Wrong location" when we are unable to locate an incident scene.

**Answer:** Yes, 621 is an appropriate code to use in the situation described.

**Question:** Can Incident Type 300 be used for an incident where an EMS module will be used also?

**Answer:** No, validation rules will not allow it. Some 300 series Incident Types will not allow the EMS module to be used, such as 340 series. One solution is to select a specific EMS type incident rather than the generic 300 Incident Type.

**Question:** An individual set fire to a paper towel in a department store and held it up to a sprinkler head. The sprinkler activated transmitting an alarm bringing the fire department. What Incident Type should be used for this situation?

**Answer:** The fire was not a hostile fire. The fire was controlled and used as device to set off the sprinkler. The incident type is not a fire (1xx); the incident type code is 710 - Malicious False Call, Other.

**Question:** As a result of the recent anthrax incidents, our department has responded to numerous incidents for investigations of potential biohazards. How should these incidents be coded?

**Answer:** As of the January, 2002 NFIRS Specification Cycle release, the NFIRS 5.0 Incident Type codes includes 3 new codes intended to help departments code biohazard incidents more accurately.

***Intentional Biohazard Incident***

Code the Incident Type as Incident Type 451 (Biological hazard, confirmed or suspected).

- The Hazardous Material Release field should be coded as 0 (Other, special HazMat actions required) and the HazMat module should be completed.
- On the HazMat module, code the Cause of Release as 1 (Intentional).
- Free-form enter the actual name of the biohazard agent in the Chemical Name field (ex. Anthrax) on the HazMat module rather than picking one of the chemicals from the existing database list.
- For Anthrax releases code one of the Factors Affecting Mitigation as 21 (Release of extremely dangerous agent).
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***Unintentional Biohazard Incident***

- Same as above except code the Cause of Release as 2 (Unintentional).



***Biohazard Reported But No Hazard Found***

- For good intent calls, use Incident Type 672 (Biological hazard investigation, none found).
- For false Biohazard threats use Incident Type 751 (Biological hazard, malicious false report).

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## MUTUAL AID

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***Question:*** The only fire apparatus from Fire Department A is responding to an incident when it is involved in an accident. Fire Department B is then dispatched to the incident Fire Department A was originally responding to and also sends a fire apparatus to the scene of the accident.

*How would Fire Department A code their response?*

*How would Fire Department B code their response?*

***Answer:*** Fire Department A would be responsible for the report on the original incident they were responding to as it is in their responsible area whether they arrived or not. The Incident Type would show what the incident was and the fact they “received aid.” The actual data might be collected by Department B which handled the incident. Department A would also report an incident with an incident type of “canceled in route” to cover the accident. This report would also show “aid received” from Fire Dept. B.

Fire Department B would complete two incident reports. Fire department B would complete one for the original incident, and one for the apparatus accident. They would report “Aid Given” for each incident.

***Question:*** If the FDID number of the receiving fire department on a “Aid Given” response is not a required field, why is a warning error created if it is left blank?

***Answer:*** The warning is creating if the FDID number is not provided to remind fire departments to get the data if they can. When the information is not available the field may be left blank. There are a number of reasons why the field might have to be left blank. These include:

*The fire department giving the aid did not know the FDID of the receiving department and could not get it for some reason.*

*The fire department receiving the aid did not have an FDID because it does not participate in NFIRS or, it is in a state that has not assigned FDID's to its fire departments.*

**Question:** If an incident involved the fire department giving aid to a private ambulance service or police department, should that be reported as “Aid Given” in block D of the Basic Module?

**Answer:** No, the intent of reporting “Aid Given” is to report aid given to other fire departments or to geographic areas where there is an agreement for coverage (coded as “other aid given”). Aid to a private ambulance should probably be coded as an incident type 311 with the appropriate actions taken. The assistance to the police would probably be coded as an incident type 551 or 552, again, with the appropriate actions taken.

**Question:** We have a number of jurisdictions that have contracted with other fire departments or districts to provide fire protection services. The problem we are having is identifying where the incidents actually took place. An example of this would be:

Westport Fire District #1 provides fire protection services to the City of Westport. The fire district is also submitting NFIRS 5.0 data for both jurisdictions. What FDID number should be used in this instance? Is it possible to issue FDID numbers with a +1 code, or letter delineator that would identify "contract departments", or is it required that the contracted agency enter data using the contractor's FDID?

**Answer:** You cannot assign a plus one code to a FDID. NFIRS 5.0 now includes a "station" field, which can be used locally to distinguish between the different stations that share a common FDID. Assign a unique station ID for each of these contract departments. That way when you see the incident report you can tell who did what by looking at the station number, even though one is reporting for both jurisdictions and they all have the same FDID. So, essentially you would be treating them as "stations" of the same fire department (for reporting purposes only).

**Question:** How are the mutual aids given and/or received tracked if the FDID number or Incident Type is not a required field for the department receiving the mutual aid? Shouldn't it be required that the department receiving the mutual aid get the FDID number and Incident number of the department giving them the aid? Is the incident counted twice?

**Answer:**

There is an on-line report that allows you to track the broken FDID, Incident number links for the departments in your state. You can run it by date so that you can see who still has not corrected the missing information since the last time you ran it. It is not required because there are some cases where it may be very difficult for the department to obtain the information. An example of that might be if the Aid Given was to a non-NFIRS department without an assigned FDID in the system. The system reports do not count the Aid Given incidents, only the Aid Received incidents, just as in the 4.1 system. The Fire Service casualties and resources are all that are picked up and used from the Aid Given reports. Resources are only picked up when the receiving department did not check the "check box if resource counts include aid received resources" box.

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## ACTIONS TAKEN

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**Question:** A fire department responds to a motor vehicle accident with reported injuries. Upon arrival, department personnel evaluate each victim and find no injuries. How would the incident type and action taken be coded?

**Answer:** The incident type could be a “vehicle accident, general cleanup (463)” or “good intent, other (600)” depending on the situation. The Type of Actions Taken would reflect what was done and could include “checking for injuries (31)”, “removing hazard (45)” or “investigation (86)”.

**Question:** Are there expanded definitions for the following Wildland Actions Taken: “contain fire (14)”, “confine fire (15)”, “control fire (16)”.

**Answer:** Yes. Expanded definitions are found in the Glossary of NFIRS Reference Guide.

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## FIRE SERVICE CASUALTIES

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**Question:** Should the firefighter casualty count on the Basic Module, block H1, include only firefighters injured during fires? The definition in handbook seems to imply that only casualties associated with fires are reported.

**Answer:** No. All firefighter injuries are to be reported regardless of what type of incident they occurred at. Remember to also complete a firefighter casualty form (NFIRS-5) for each firefighter casualty.

**Question:** If a firefighter is injured on the job but not at an incident, e.g. at a training exercise, would the total injuries shown under Fire Service Casualty in Basic Module, Block H1, include this injury?

**Answer:** Yes. An incident should be created for all fire service casualties, whether or not they occur at an incident, and these injuries included in the total in Block H1. The incident type would probably be coded as “EMS call (321)”.

**Question:** In the Basic Module, Block H1, Casualties, it is not clear who to include in the total casualty count.

**Answer:** The total listed in the Fire Service Casualty fields includes all injuries or deaths related to any type of incident. There may be more Fire Service Casualty reports completed than the total listed in Block H1 because Fire Service Casualty Reports can also be used to record the exposure of fire fighters to hazardous materials or infectious diseases at the incident. Recording a code 1 in Block G3 of the Fire Service Casualty Module indicates such exposures that do not immediately cause an injury or death. The total civilian casualties includes fire related injuries and deaths only, and does not include injuries or deaths due to EMS, hazardous materials incidents or other incident types.

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## CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

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**Question:** Can hazardous materials incident related civilian casualties be entered in Block H1 of the Basic Module?

**Answer:** No. Only fire-related civilian casualties are listed in Basic Module Block H1 and the Civilian Casualty Module may be used for only fire related incidents.

**Question:** A fire department is notified six weeks after the fact of the following case. It appears that an elderly woman was cooking. Her clothes catch fire and she is burned. A male companion comes to visit, finds her on the floor, badly burned, and takes her to the hospital. She is then transferred to the burn center where she died. There was no response by fire department, police, or EMS.

**Answer:** Since there was no fire department response, there was NO INCIDENT. The department may want to collect information on fire where there is no fire department response in a separate database

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## PERSON / ENTITY INVOLVED

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**Question:** On an airplane fire incident, is the owner information supposed to reflect the owner of the vehicle (airplane) or the property where the airplane sits?

**Answer:** Owner information is for the aircraft.

**Question:** On a vehicle fire, is the owner listed on the Basic Module, Block K2, the owner of the property or the vehicle?

**Answer:** The owner listed is the owner of the vehicle. If a non-owner is driving the vehicle, then that person is entered in the Person/Entity Involved field. If the vehicle fire extends to other property, then information on the owner of that property is captured on an exposure report.

## NFIRS 2: Fire Module

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### HEAT SOURCE

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**Question:** On the Fire Module, how would a fire be coded in section “E” that results from material being placed or stored too close to a heat source.

**Answer:** The cause of ignition would be “unintentional (2),” the Factor contributing to ignition would be “heat source too close to combustibles (12),” and Human factors contributing to ignition would be coded as “none.”

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### MOBILE PROPERTY / EQUIPMENT INVOLVED

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**Question:** Why can Mobile Property Type and Equipment Involved in Ignition not both be reported for the same incident?

**Answer:** The Data Entry Tool will allow entry of both Mobile Property Type and Equipment Involved in Ignition for the same incident.

**Question:** I got an error because I had both mobile property and equipment involved in ignition. The incident involved a car running into an air conditioner.

**Answer:** The way mobile property is treated in the NFIRS system is as a special type of equipment. When a vehicle is involved in the ignition, rather than completing the "Equipment Involved" fields, specific fields designed just to capture vehicle information are completed instead. So, you can never have Equipment Involved in Ignition and Mobile Property involved in Ignition on the same incident. Since only one type of equipment can be involved in the ignition of the fire, they are mutually exclusive.



## NFIRS 3: Structure Fire Module

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### BUILDING HEIGHT

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**Question:** On the Structure Fire Module, Building Height (I3), should mechanical or enclosed attic spaces be counted as a separate story or as a part of the highest story?

**Answer:** Mechanical spaces and enclosed attics should be counted as a separate story only if they have normal access (stairs or doors) and are of at least standing height. Inaccessible attics, attics with less than standing height, inaccessible mechanical spaces or the roof would normally be part of the highest story.

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### MAIN FLOOR SIZE

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**Question:** When coding a structure fire in an apartment building, do you enter the square footage, Block I4, for just the apartment involved in the fire or for the entire building (two story building).

**Answer:** What should be entered is the length times the width (in feet) of the floor where the fire occurred (square feet).

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### AUTOMATIC EXTINGUISHING SYSTEM

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**Question:** How do you code a situation where it is unknown if there is an automatic extinguishing system (Structure Fire Module, Block M1)?

**Answer:** Currently, Data Entry tool requires entry in this field for structure fires. Recommendation is to enter “none” and in remarks indicate that AES presence was unknown. It will be recommended that a choice of Unknown be added for this field.



**Question:** In the Structure Fire Module, Block M1, “Presence of Automatic Extinguishing Systems”, is there a selection for “Undetermined”?

**Answer:** Currently, there is no “Undetermined” code. States have the option of using the Plus one codes, expanding the field N1 for “None” and N2 for undetermined.

## NFIRS 4: Civilian Fire Casualty Module

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### GENERAL QUESTIONS

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**Question:** Is there any check or correlation between NFIRS data on a civilian fire casualty and hospital mortality data with regard to fire deaths?

**Answer:** The U.S. Fire Administration and the Consumer Product Safety Commission are currently working on a joint project to match death certificates to NFIRS and non-NFIRS fire incident reports in order to learn more detailed information about fire related fatalities.

**Question:** If there is a non-fatal civilian fire casualty and that person dies subsequent to leaving the scene, what is the criteria for reporting this casualty as a death?

**Answer:** If the person was injured as a result of the fire and died up to one year after the fire, they should be reported as a fatality. The civilian casualty report will need to be updated.

**Question:** Incident Type 240 (No Fire, Explosion) will not accept a casualty report. The casualty report said the civilian suffered thermal burns due to the gas leak explosion. Do we not want to track this type of injury or is this incident type wrong?

**Answer:** The NFIRS 5.0 system will only allow Civilian Fire Casualty forms to be completed for fire incidents. In NFIRS 4.1, overpressure ruptures and explosions with no resulting fire were grouped in with fires. In NFIRS 5.0, by consensus, they are not considered fires. Due to this, the completion of the civilian fire casualty module is not allowed. The civilian fire casualty module may only be completed when the Incident Type is in the 100 series.



## NFIRS 5: Fire Service Casualty Module

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### GENERAL QUESTIONS

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**Question:** Is the Fire Service Casualty Module only used to report injuries, deaths, or exposures to fire service personnel when responding to an incident? Or is it also used whenever a firefighter is injured, dies, etc. (for example, if s/he is hurt at the station, but it didn't involve a response to an incident, or if the injury occurs during training)? The handbook says "with any incident response", but the activity at time of injury codes list station activity codes, such as "training Activity (88), or "drill (82)", Moving around the station, normal activity, etc.

**Answer:** The Fire Service Casualty Module is used to all report injuries, deaths, or exposures to fire service personnel even when they weren't directly responding to an incident.

In order to do this however, you do need to create an EMS incident in the system and treat it as if the same department with the injuries responded to the EMS. The reason for this is that NFIRS is an incident based system and without establishing an incident response of some sort, these injuries can't be captured. So the way we do it is by creating an EMS incident. This is an exception of a sort in how we treat incidents so you'll need to be very careful when counting fire service casualties not to include these counts in with the those that got injured when actually responding to an incident. The only real way to tell the difference is to look at the Activity at Time of Injury codes  $\geq 80$  (Station Activity and Other Activity) when performing the analysis. Those incidents should be excluded when counting fire fighters casualties on the incident scene.

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### PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT FAILURE

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**Question:** In the Fire Service Casualty Module, Block K1, how should multiple injuries to a firefighter be reported? Which injury is the one to track relative to equipment failure?

**Answer:** If a single accident at an incident results in multiple injuries to the same firefighter, the most significant injury should be reported. If equipment failure was a contributing factor to any of the injuries in a single accident, that equipment failure should be reported. Please note that because only one injury can be reported, the equipment failures noted may not always correlated to the injury reported.



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## NFIRS 6: EMS Module

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### INITIAL LEVEL OF PROVIDER

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**Question:** On the EMS Module, Initial Level of Provider (L1), is it the intent to report fire department personnel only or private ambulance services as well?

**Answer:** You are only reporting on your department's activities so private ambulance services are not reported.

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### DISPOSITION

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**Question:** A firefighter is injured at the scene, and is transported by mutual aid EMS unit. In NFIRS-6, section N, Disposition, would FD transport to ECF (1)" or "non-FD transport (2)" be used?

**Answer:** If the transporting EMS unit was a Fire Department EMS unit, use 1. If it was a non-Fire Department EMS, use 2.

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### LEVEL OF PROVIDER ON SCENE

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**Question:** We are EMT-I with defibrillator certification. We contract with a paramedic ambulance service to respond to all of our EMS calls. What codes should we use in the Initial Level of FD Provider at Scene and Highest Level of FD Provider at Scene? Currently we are using EMT-B to indicate our department and 0-Other health provider to indicate the ambulance service. Example: On most calls we would provide the initial care and the ambulance personnel would then take over. We would enter "EMT-B" for initial care and "0"(Other health provider) for highest level. Is this correct?

**Answer:** You would code your EMS runs exactly as you indicated for initial level of provider but would only indicate the highest level of care provided by your personnel. For instance a first responder unit, equipped with an EMT-B and an EMT-I, arrives on scene for a patient with chest pain. Code L1 as (3) then the 3rd party ambulance (Rural Metro, AMR, etc.) arrives. Code L2 as (3) also, since another Agency is now transporting and caring for the patient.



## NFIRS 7: Hazardous Materials Module

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### HAZMAT ID

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**Question:** Can a hazardous materials incident be coded where the chemical listed is unknown?

**Answer:** Currently, the system will not allow the coding of an “unknown” chemical type. Systems committee will recommend that “Unknown” be added to list of chemicals.





## **NFIRS 8: Wildland Fire Module**



## NFIRS 9: Arson Module

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### SUSPECTED MOTIVATION FACTORS

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**Question:** In the Arson Module, Block E, “Suspected Motivation Factors”, code 54 (burglary) is not listed in the 5.0 Reference Guide. Is code 54 a valid code?

**Answer:** Yes, code 54 (burglary) is a valid code, and the Reference Guide will be updated.



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