

2012

NFIRS 5.0

CODING QUESTIONS MANUAL

United States Fire Administration
NATIONAL FIRE DATA CENTER



FEMA

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NFIRS 1: BASIC MODULE

General Questions

Question 1.1: If a fire department is canceled while en-route to an incident (Incident Type 611), does the entire Basic Module have to be completed?

Answer: Blocks A through E1, F, and G1 are required.

Question 1.2: Should incident reports be generated for a fire department training exercise?

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 report all 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 1.3: 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: Setting up a temporary substation is not an incident; however, each response made by staff from the substation is an incident.

Question 1.4: 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: This is one incident. 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 the amount of resources and hours for these types of incidents.

Question 1.5: The NFIRS Student Manual (page SM 1-3) states that only the Basic Module (NFIRS 1) needs completed for small vegetation fires, but the Data Entry Tool requires the Fire Module for vegetation fires.

Answer: Small vegetation fires require a fire module (i.e., Fire or Wildland Fire).

Exposures

Question 1.6: If a single hazardous materials incident involves more than one property, how do you report the address/location 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 1.7: Heat from a fire resulted in the melting of aluminum siding on an adjacent home. The adjacent home sustained major dollar loss. Is this an exposure? If so, what is the incident type?

Answer: The use of an 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 1.8: 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 NFIRS Complete Reference Guide, should I “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, they may all be treated as a single exposure.

Dates and Times

Question 1.9: If an incident does not have an arrival time or a controlled time, what should be reported?

Answer: If the unit is canceled en-route, Arrival Date/Time is not required. Also, if the Apparatus/Resources Module or the Personnel Module is used, no arrival date/time for an individual unit is required, but the action by the unit must be canceled en-route (code 93).

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 canceled en-route. A controlled date and time are only required for a wildland fire.

Incident Type

Question 1.10: 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.

Question 1.11: 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 specialized unit would be giving aid 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 1.12: A fire department responds to a call for power lines down and on arrival 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 1.13: 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 = N (none)

Action Taken = 92 (standby)

Fire Department B's incident:

Incident Type = 735 (alarm malfunction)

Aid Given or Received = N (none)

Action Taken = 86 (investigate)

For More Information, please see Aid Given or Received Question 1.19

Question 1.14: Fire Department A is dispatched to an out of town incident but was canceled en-route. The incident turned out to be related to an alarm system malfunction. 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 = 611 (dispatched and canceled en-route)

Actions Taken = 93 (canceled en-route)

Aid Given or Received = N (none)

Fire Department B's incident:

Incident Type = 735

Aid Given or Received = N (none)

Action Taken = 86 (investigate)

Question 1.15: Should we use code "621 – Wrong location" when we are unable to locate an incident scene?

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

Question 1.16: Can Incident Type 300 be used for an incident where an EMS Module will be used also?

Answer: The 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. The EMS Module is only allowed for incident types 100-243, 311, 321-323, 351-381, 400-431, 451, 900.

Question 1.17: 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 a 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 1.18: As a result of anthrax incidents, our department has responded to numerous incidents for investigations of potential biohazards. How should these incidents be coded?

Answer: The Incident Type codes include three codes intended to help departments code biohazard incidents more accurately.

Intentional Biohazard Incident

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

- The Hazardous Materials Release field should be coded as O (Other, special HazMat actions required) and the HazMat Module should be completed.
- On the HazMat Module, code the Cause of Release as I (Intentional).
- Free-form, enter the actual name of the biohazard agent in the Chemical Name field (e.g., 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).

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).

Aid Given or Received

Question 1.19: When a fire department responds outside of its jurisdiction, when is it NOT aid given (i.e., automatic or mutual)?

Answer: Two conditions have to be true for a fire department to record in NFIRS that aid is given or received: (1) The aid involves another fire department, and (2) both fire departments are at the incident (i.e., at the scene or staging). Negative examples of aid given or received are listed below:

- If a fire department is called to assist another fire department but gets canceled before arriving at the scene, no aid is given or received because both fire departments are not at the incident.

- If a fire department receives help from a non-fire service EMS department, no aid is given or received because the EMS department is not a fire department.
- If a fire department is dispatched from its station to handle an incident in another jurisdiction because the other fire department is unavailable, no aid is given or received because both fire departments are not at the incident. Only the fire department that responds to the incident completes an NFIRS report.
- If a fire department is filling-in at another fire department's station and responds to a vehicle fire, no aid is given or received because the department that is covering becomes resources of the other department; only one fire department is at the incident. The department that is filling-in completes only one NFIRS report for its FDID during its stay at the other department's station: a cover assignment (Incident Type 571). All incidents during the cover assignment are recorded under the other department's FDID.

Question 1.20: 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 that 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 its response? How would Fire Department B code its response?

Answer: Fire Department A never arrived to the incident. The department was canceled en-route. Fire Department B responded to two incidents: The department responded to the original incident that Department A was dispatched to. The incident belonged to Department B since Department A was never on scene. The second incident was an EMS incident. No aid was given or received in this scenario.

Question 1.21: If the FDID number of the receiving fire department on an "Aid Given" response is not a required field, why is a warning error created if it is left blank?

Answer: The warning is created if the FDID number is not provided to remind the person completing the report to get the data. 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.
- 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 an FDID to the fire department.

Question 1.22: 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 - assistance - 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. In both cases, no aid is given.

Question 1.23: 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 data for both jurisdictions. What FDID number should be used in this instance? Is it possible to issue FDID numbers with a plus one 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 an FDID. NFIRS includes a district field to help further identify the location of incidents (e.g., a call within the city of Westport would be entered as one district and a call outside of the city of Westport would be entered as a different district).

Question 1.24: How is aid given or received tracked if the FDID number or incident type is not a required field for the department receiving the aid? Shouldn’t it be required that the department receiving the aid gets the FDID number and incident number of the department giving them the aid? Is the incident counted twice?

Answer: Whenever aid is coded as received, another fire department(s) should code aid as given. When coded correctly, the incident is not counted twice. There is an on-line report that allows you to track the broken FDID and 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. The FDID and incident number of fire departments giving aid are not required on the receiving fire department’s report. The receiving fire department’s FDID and incident number are needed on the report of the fire departments giving aid so that those reports can be linked to the primary report – the receiving department’s report. Most NFIRS reports do not count the aid given incidents, only the aid received incidents. The fire service casualties and resources are all that are picked up and used from the Aid Given reports. Resources are picked up only when the receiving department did not check the “check box if resource counts include aid received resources” box.

Question 1.25: Our department was dispatched to assist another department; however, we were canceled before arriving at the scene. How should we code this mutual aid given report?

Answer: Since you never arrived on the scene, no aid was given. For Aid to be given or received two conditions must be met: The aid given or received must involve another fire department AND both fire departments must be at the scene of the incident (i.e., at the scene, or staging.)

Question 1.26: EMS Services in our jurisdiction are provided by a third-party ambulance service and one of our Engines / Quick Response Unit is automatically dispatched to assist them on every call. When we assist them on the scene is this considered automatic aid given?

Answer: This is not automatic aid given because you are not assisting another fire department.

Question 1.27: Our department was dispatched to handle a call in the neighboring town because their fire department was on another call, is this an automatic aid given incident since I was helping out another fire department?

Answer: No automatic or mutual aid was given by your department because the primary fire department was not at the incident. Only the fire department that responds to the incident completes an NFIRS report. The report can be coded as other aid given (Code 5). Other aid given is when a department responds in an area that has no fire department or responds in an area where the primary department did not respond to the incident.

Question 1.28: Department A was filling in Department B's station. While there Department A handles a vehicle fire. How does Department A complete the report?

Answer: When a department moves up to cover another fire department, it becomes that department. Department A should complete the report as if it was Department B, using Department B's FDID number; no aid was given or received. Department A would only complete one incident report during its stay at Department B's station: a cover assignment (incident type 571.)

Actions Taken

Question 1.29: 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 action taken would reflect what was done and could include "checking for injuries (31)", "removing hazard (45)" or "Investigation (86)".

Question 1.30: 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.

Fire Service Casualties

Question 1.31: 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 the incident type. Remember to also complete a Firefighter Casualty Module (NFIRS-5) for each firefighter casualty.

Question 1.32: 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 is created for all on-duty fire service casualties including injuries at the fire station. These casualties are included in the total of Block H1. The incident type would probably be coded as “EMS call (321)”.

Question 1.33: 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. The total of civilian casualties includes fire related injuries and deaths only. It does not include injuries or deaths due to EMS, hazardous materials incidents or other incident types.

Civilian Casualties

Question 1.34: 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. The Civilian Casualty Module is used for only fire-related incidents to non-fire department personnel.

Question 1.35: 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.

Person/Entity Involved

Question 1.36: For 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. When mobile property is involved in the ignition, the owner's information in Section K2 of the Basic Module is the owner of the mobile property.

Question 1.37: For 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. When mobile property is involved in the ignition, the owner's information in Section K2 of the Basic Module is the owner of the mobile property. If a non-owner is driving, 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

Heat Source

Question 2.1: On the Fire Module, how is a fire coded in Section E that was caused by 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.”

Mobile Property/Equipment Involved

Question 2.2: Why cannot Mobile Property Type and Equipment Involved in Ignition be reported for the same incident?

Answer: There cannot be both mobile property involved and equipment involved in the ignition of a fire (NFIRS Relational Edit #163). It must be one or the other.

Question 2.3: 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

Building Height

Question 3.1: 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.

Main Floor Size

Question 3.2: 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: Enter the square footage of the main floor of the building, or enter the length-by-width measurement (in feet) of the main floor.

Automatic Extinguishing System

Question 3.3: How do you code a situation where it is unknown if there is an automatic extinguishing system (Structure Fire Module, Block M1)?

Answer: The code is U for undetermined.

NFIRS 4: CIVILIAN FIRE CASUALTY MODULE

General Questions

Question 4.1: Is there any check or correlation between NFIRS data on a civilian fire casualty and hospital mortality data with regard to fire deaths?

Answer: There is no check or correlation between them.

Question 4.2: If there is a civilian fire injury and the person dies after the report was filed, what are the criteria for reporting this casualty as a death?

Answer: If the person was injured as a result of the fire and died from the injury up to one year after the fire, the injury should be changed to as a fatality. The civilian casualty report and the type of casualty on the Basic Module will need to be updated.

Question 4.3: 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: NFIRS allows Civilian Fire Casualty Modules to be completed only 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 module may be completed only when the incident type is in the 100 series. The injury can be documented on the EMS Module.

NFIRS 5: FIRE SERVICE CASUALTY MODULE

General Questions

Question 5.1: 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 or dies (e.g., if the firefighter 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 report all on-duty 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 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 to do it is 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 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 ≥ 80 (Station Activity and Other Activity) when performing the analysis. Those incidents should be excluded when counting firefighters casualties on the incident scene.

Protective Equipment Failure

Question 5.2: In the Fire Service Casualty Module, Block K1, how do I report multiple injuries to a firefighter? Which injury is the one to track relative to equipment failure?

Answer: If an accident results in multiple injuries to the same firefighter, the most significant injury should be reported in Sections I and J. All other injuries should be reported in Remarks. If equipment failure was a contributing factor to the reported injury in Section I and J (the most severe injury), that equipment should be reported.

NFIRS 6: EMS MODULE

Initial Level of Provider

Question 6.1: 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 your department's activities and not reporting private ambulance services.

Disposition

Question 6.2: 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.

Level of Provider on Scene

Question 6.3: We are EMT-1 with defibrillator certification. We contract with a paramedic ambulance service to respond to all 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 O-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 "O" (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-1, arrives on scene for a patient with chest pains. Code the Initial Level of Provider (L1) as 3. The third party ambulance (e.g., Rural Metro, AMR) arrives. Code the Highest Level of Care Provided on Scene (L2) as 3 also since another agency is now transporting and caring for the patient.

NFIRS 7: HAZARDOUS MATERIALS MODULE

HazMat ID

Question 7.1: 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 name. If the incident is recorded using either the NFIRS Data Entry Tool (DET) or the NFIRS Data Entry Browser Interface (DEBI), a blank entry for Chemical Name does not create an error message.

NFIRS 8: *WILDLAND FIRE MODULE*

NFIRS 9: ARSON MODULE

Suspected Motivation Factors

Question 9.1: 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 it is listed in the NFIRS Complete Reference Guide.

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