Reliability of Eyewitness Statements in Fire and Explosion Investigations

Authors : Jeff Colwell, Benjamin Knox

Abstract : While fire and explosion incidents are often observed by eyewitnesses, the weight that fire investigators should place on those observations in their investigations is a complex issue. There is no doubt that eyewitness statements can be an important component to an investigation, particularly when other evidence is sparse, as is often the case when damage to the scene is severe. However, it is well known that eyewitness statements can be incorrect for a variety of reasons, including deception. In this paper, we reviewed factors that can have an effect on the complex processes associated with the perception, retention, and retrieval of an event. We then review the accuracy of eyewitness statements from unique criminal and civil incidents, including fire and explosion incidents, in which the accuracy of the statements could be independently evaluated. Finally, the motives for deceptive eyewitness statements are described, along with techniques that fire and explosion investigators can employ, to increase the accuracy of the eyewitness statements that they solicit.

Keywords : fire, explosion, eyewitness, reliability

Conference Title : ICFSST 2022 : International Conference on Fire Safety Science and Technology

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : September 22-23, 2022