

North Dakota Office of the State Fire Marshal (ND)

INCIDENT REPORT

Official Law Enforcement Report - Unauthorized Dissemination is Prohibited

Incident Type: Fire / Undetermined

Agency Incident ID: NDSFM25-008

BATS ID: 1543912

Investigation Title: BISMARCK KNOPP FIRE



Incident Date/Time/Location

Status

Investigation Closed

Start Date/Time

1/26/2025 21:00 Sunday

Address

126 Watercress Ave

City/State/Zip

Bismarck, ND 58503

County

Burleigh County

Investigator Information

Name

Jordan A VanBerkum

Phone

701-220-5063

Email

jvanberkum@nd.gov

Title

Deputy Fire Marshal

Property Use or Target Information

Type

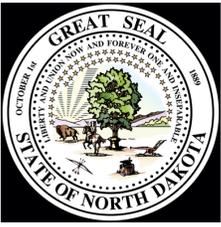
Residential

Subtype

1 (Single Family) or 2 Family Dwelling

Status

Occupied And Operating



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## Scene Details

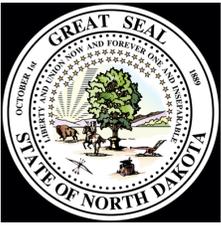
## Miscellaneous Information

### Latitude

46.904968

### Longitude

-100.791352



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Person/Organization Information

Name

KNOPP, DARYL

DOB

1980

Sex

M

Juvenile

No

Relationship(s)

Occupant

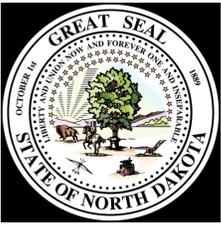
Race

White

Ethnicity

Age at time of Incident

44



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**Name**

KNOPP, SUZY

**DOB**

██████ 1981

**Sex**

F

**Juvenile**

No

**Relationship(s)**

Occupant

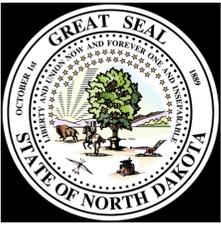
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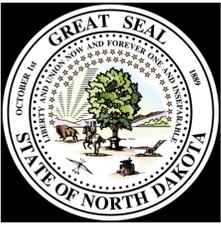
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**Attachments**

<b>Filename</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Date</b>
NDSFM25-008-1 Bismarck Knopp Fire Origin and Cause Report.pdf		10/20/2025

**No image specified**



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**Narrative(s)**

**Title**

Contacts

**Author**

Jordan VanBerkum

7012205063

jvanberkum@nd.gov

**Description**

Dustin L. Theurer - dtheurer@bismarckruralfire.org



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\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator/Agent - VanBerkum, Jordan

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Approving Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



# North Dakota State Fire Marshals Office (ND)



## INCIDENT ORIGIN & CAUSE NARRATIVE

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**Investigation Title: Bismarck knopp Fire**

### Identify the Need

**Call for Service (dispatch, request, date, time):**

Deputy Fire Marshal Kirstin Greaney-Stanger contacted me at approximately 10:19 p.m. on January 26th, 2025, regarding a single-family home structure fire in Bismarck, ND, that the Bismarck Rural Fire Protection District was requesting our assistance with. I spoke with Assistant Fire Chief Brian Reinke, and it was decided that the investigation would start at 2:00 p.m. on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

North Dakota Century Code 18-01-07 states, "An investigation of each fire must be made by the officers required to report the occurrence of fires under section 18-01-06."

### Define the Problem

**Nature of Incident/Incident Overview:**

On January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at approximately 10:00 pm, Daryl Knopp called to report a structure fire in a two-story single-family home at 126 Watercress Ave, Bismarck, ND 58503. No injuries or fatalities were reported. (See Figure 1.)



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Figure 1. The front of the home facing north.

### Authority to Enter/Search:

I arrived on scene at approximately 2:00 pm on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Upon arrival, the owner of the property, Daryl Knopp, was presented with a Consent to Search form, which he signed. The signed copy will be with the file.

After my investigation, I cleared the scene at approximately 4:00 pm. Before leaving the scene, I met with the owner to let him know that we were finished with our investigation.

### Assisting Person/Agencies:

Name	Agency	Case Reference if Available
Special Agent Luke Kapella	North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation	
Deputy Chief Brian Reinke	Bismarck Rural Fire Department	2025-041

### Fatalities/Injuries:

Name	Fatality/Injury:	Notes/Other Information



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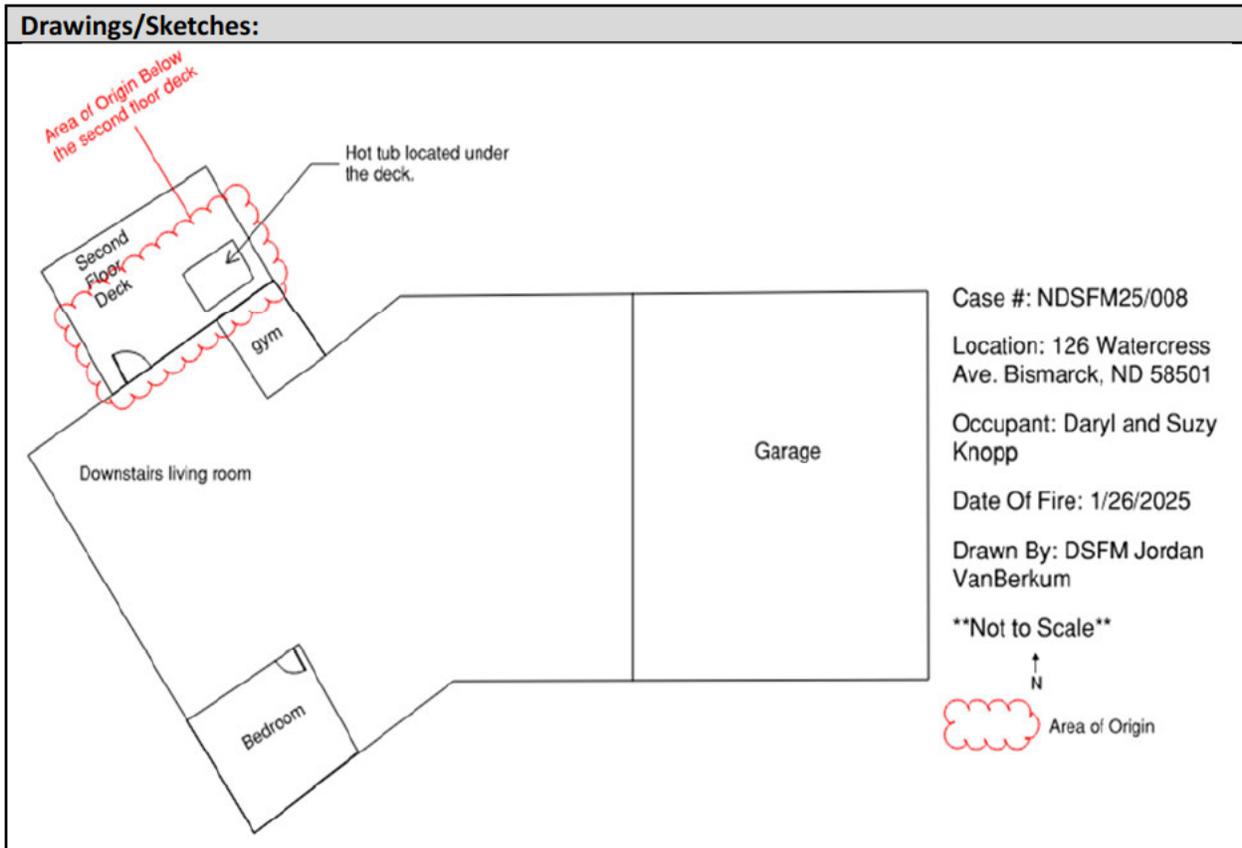
		No injuries or fatalities were reported.
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### Data Collection

#### **Photographs:**

Before altering the fire scene, I photographed it to document it as I found it and the examination process. During the investigation, 34 photographs were taken. The photographs and photograph log will remain with the file.

#### **Drawings/Sketches:**



#### **Exterior Scene Examination:**

The exterior examination began on the south side of the home, which is also the front or street side.

The structure was a two-story home with a basement, vinyl siding, and asphalt shingles.

The home's natural gas utilities and electrical services are entered on the east side of the house. Per Daryl Knopp, the gas company had removed the natural gas meter, and the electrical power was disconnected by Central Power.



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The south side of the home, which faced the street, sustained mass loss to the windows, doors, and garage doors. The exterior walls had charring, with the southeast side of the home sustaining greater damage to the exterior walls than the southwest (See Figure 2).



*Figure 2. South side of the home.*

The east side sustained more damage to the home's northeast than the southeast. The southeast part of the house still had some siding and a portion of the roof soffit. The burn pattern indicates the fire burned upward and outward from the north side of the house toward the south. The northeast side showed charring of the remaining wall framing, while the southwest side had deformation to the vinyl siding.

The north side of the home sustained mass loss. The burn pattern shows the home had burned from the east to the west, with the northeast exterior wall sustaining mass loss and the garage's exterior wall intact, but the roof, windows, and door were consumed. The garage's exterior wall had deformed siding, with multiple holes that had burned through the wall. (See Figure 2.)



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Figure 3. The north side of the home shows the damage compared to the northeast and northwest of the home.

The home's garage was located on the east side of the house. The northeast side of the wall was burned completely through, with the fire patterns showing a burn pattern on the north wall left on the south exterior wall, sustaining mass loss that progressed from the north to the south of the home. The plywood walls under the vinyl siding show charring and smoke damage, with the vinyl siding being melted and distorted.

### Interior Scene Examination:

My interior examination was limited to taking pictures from the outside into the interior area of the home due to the exterior walls still standing in the home being unstable and swaying in the wind. The house's interior had been consumed by fire, with portions of exterior walls on the east, south, and west still standing. The burn patterns on the east exterior wall extended from the north to the south and from the bottom to the top. The southern exterior wall had the most standing, with the burn patterns coming from the top down, with more of the wall still standing towards the bottom than the top. The west exterior wall had a portion of the exterior basement and upper floor wall standing, with the burn pattern showing a burn from the north to the south. I observed a heat-induced color change in the weight-lifting rack in the basement of the home (See Figure 4).



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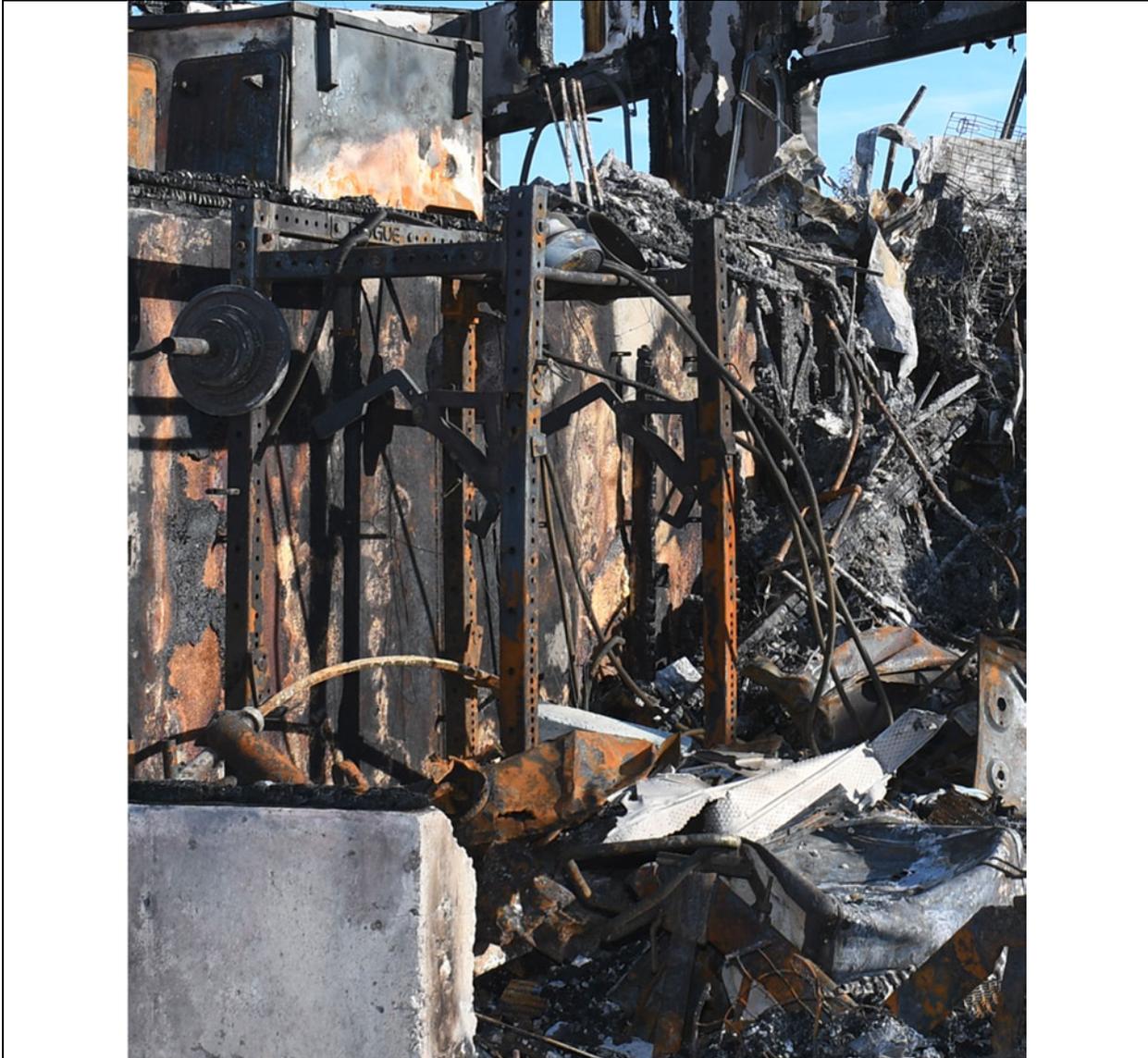


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*Figure 4. The weight rack located in the basement had a heat-induced color change.*

Below is a picture of where the homeowner's hot tub was located. On the evening of the fire, Daryl Knopp sat in that hot tub and had two beers and two or three cigarettes. The hot tub and the deck above it sustained mass loss (see Figure 5).



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*Figure 5. Showing the mass loss sustained to the hot tub on the northwest side of the home.*

During the investigation, I observed the wiring for the hot tub. The wiring had sustained mass loss and also had a burn pattern that progressed from the east to the west down the foundation of the home. (See Figure 6.)



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Figure 6. A wire was observed on the north side of the home with a burn pattern on the home's foundation.

<b>Interview #1:</b>	
<b>Name:</b>	Daryl Knopp and Suzy Knopp
<b>Interview Date:</b>	1/29/2025
<p><b>Notes:</b> The following is a summary of a non-recorded, non-custodial interview with home owners Daryl and Suzy Knopp conducted at the scene in the homeowner's shop. Daryl Knopp was aware he could stop the interview at any time and did not have to answer any questions.</p> <p>Daryl stated that he and a friend were in the shop all day working on his truck. Suzy, Daryl's wife, said she was in and around the house all day as well until she went to pick up pizza for dinner. At approximately 6:00 pm, Daryl came in for dinner. After dinner, Daryl said he cleaned up and then sat in the hot tub at 7:45 for about 8-10 minutes, had 2 beers, and smoked 2-3 cigarettes. Daryl stated that he did not see anyone else when he was outside prior to the fire. Daryl stated that he took a phone call at 7:58 pm. After the call, Daryl said he and Suzy were in the living room watching TV until Suzy heard "popping". At first, she thought Daryl had something in the dryer, but after asking Daryl if he had put anything in the dryer and learning he had not, she asked Daryl to go see what the noise was.</p>	



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Daryl then went to the sliding glass door and saw visible flames. He then told Suzy to call 911 and said they had to evacuate the home. I asked Daryl to describe the patio prior to the fire. Daryl stated that the patio had a couple of planters that were on the north corners of the patio and the south side against the house. Daryl also stated that, given where their home was, it was pretty common for random leaves and other debris to blow in and build up between the hot tub and the home.

This concludes my interview with Daryl and Suzy Knopp.

Interview #2:	
<b>Name:</b>	Brian Reinke
<b>Interview Date:</b>	1/29/2025
<b>Notes:</b> The following is a summary of a non-recorded, non-custodial interview with Bismarck Rural Fire Department Assistant Chief Brian Reinke. Assistant Chief Brian Reinke knew he could stop the interview at any time and did not have to answer any questions.	
Assistant Chief Brian Reinke stated that during their response to the fire, they could see the glow of the fire from a distance on South Washington St. As they arrived on scene, Brian stated that he could see visible flames coming from the “back” north side of the home and also through the roof. Assistant Chief Reinke stated that they began the firefighting attack on the north side of the home and then were able to get an attack line into the main floor entrance.	
This concludes my interview with Daryl and Suzy Knopp.	

Interview #3:	
<b>Name:</b>	Brett Peterson
<b>Interview Date:</b>	1/30/2025
<b>Notes:</b> The following is a summary of a non-recorded, non-custodial interview with Brett Peterson, the neighbor across the street, conducted at the neighbor's residence. Brett Peterson was aware he could stop the interview at any time and did not have to answer any questions.	
Mr. Peterson, who lives at 115 Watercress Ave. across the street, said he was watching TV when the fire started. He got up to get something from the kitchen and saw a glow outside his front window. He went to the front door and saw flames coming from the back of the Knopps’ house. He quickly put on his shoes and ran over to see if he could help, but said the house was already badly on fire. Mr. Peterson stayed with the homeowners until the fire department arrived and told them he and his family were nearby if they needed anything.	
This concludes my interview with Brett Peterson.	



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**Video:**

No video was identified or stored by the Fire Marshal's Office.

**Weather Reviewed:**

The weather information was obtained from [www.wunderground.com](http://www.wunderground.com). The data was reviewed for January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The closest reporting station was the Dickinson Theodore Roosevelt Regional Airport Station, approximately 53 miles away. The following information was learned.

Time	Temperature	Wind	Wind Speed	Wind Gust	Condition
6:52 pm	26°	W	10 mph	0 mph	Fair
7:52 pm	25°	W	10 mph	0 mph	Fair
8:52 pm	24°	WSW	8 mph	0 mph	Fair
9:52 pm	22°	W	10 mph	0 mph	Fair
10:52 pm	23°	W	15 mph	0 mph	Fair
11:52 pm	24°	W	15 mph	0 mph	Fair

After reviewing the weather conditions, it was determined that the weather may have contributed to the fires ignition and or spread.

**Times:**

Hard Time Description	Time	Soft Time Description
	8:57 pm	Fire Discovered
Time of 911 call	9:00 pm	
FD Dispatch	9:01 pm	
FD arrival	9:31 pm	
	10:26 PM	Fire investigator contacted

**Evidence identified/collected/preserved:**

No evidence was identified or collected by the State Fire Marshal's Office.

**Data Analysis, hypothesis development, hypothesis testing, select final hypothesis**



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### Other Forms/Documents/Reports Reviewed:

X

NFPA 921

- 6.2.11 Oxidation
- 6.2.11.1 – Observation – The effects of oxidation include change of color and change of texture.
- 6.2.11.3 – Unprotected Iron and Steel.

Bismarck Rural Fire Department run time log.

- Dispatch times
- Fire department arrival times
- Initial scene observations.
- What time the fire department cleared the scene.

### Area of Origin:

Based on witness statements, fire dynamics, and fire patterns, the area of origin was determined to be on the northwest side of the home.

- Fire Effects
  - The west side of the home sustained more damage than the east side of the home.
  - A heat-induced color change was observed on the weight-lifting rack that was in the basement.
  - Charring and burn patterns are observed to move from the west to the east of the northern rear of the home.
- Fire Dynamics
  - A burn pattern from the bottom to the top was observed on the exterior east wall of the garage
  - The upper floors of the home sustained mass loss and had collapsed into the basement area.
  - The rear of the home had sustained mass loss, with portions of the front (south) side of the home still intact.
- Witness Statements
  - Fire chief Brian Reinke stated that upon arrival, visible flames were coming from the north side of the home, through the roof of the house.
  - Neighbors stated that they observed flames coming from the rear of the home.
  - Daryl Knopp stated that he saw flames when he looked out the sliding glass door.

### Cause Hypothesis Development and Testing:



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1. A person or persons unknown utilized an open flame source to ignite ordinary combustible materials such as paper, plastic, wood, and dried leaves.
  - Daryl and Suzy Knopp were at the residence at the time of the fire.
  - No enemies were reported by the occupants of the residence.
  - Daryl Knopp stated that he had been in the area of origin prior to the fire and did not see anyone.
  - This hypothesis can be eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.
  
2. An improperly discarded cigarette with sufficient heat came in contact with combustible Materials such as paper, plastic, wood, and dried leaves for a duration long enough to ignite the fire.
  - Daryl Knopp admitted to smoking in the hot tub prior to the fire.
  - Daryl stated that he discarded his cigarettes in a beer can while sitting in the hot tub.
  - Improperly discarded cigarettes were not found in the area of origin.
  - This hypothesis could not be eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.
  
3. An overheating of the hot tub's electrical wiring created sufficient heat for a duration long enough to ignite ordinary combustible materials such as paper, plastic, wood, and dried leaves.
  - The area of origin had electrical wiring running through the area.
  - The electrical wiring in the area of origin had mass consumption of electrical insulation.
  - The owner of the home installed the electricity for the hot tub.
  - This hypothesis could not be eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.

**Final Hypothesis/Conclusion:**

The area of origin was on the northwest side of the home on the home's patio.

Based on a systematic examination of the fire scene, fire patterns, and witness statements, along with competing hypotheses, the cause of the fire was classified as undetermined.

The opinions expressed in this conclusion are based on data and evidence collected to this point. The opinions are subject to change based on relevant, significant, and credible information discovered or provided in the future.

**References:**

Technical Committee on Fire Investigations. 2023. NFPA 921: Guide For Fire & Explosion Investigations. 2024 Edition. NFPA. Quincy, MA