

My name is Jim Streb and I am the Fire Inspector for the Cleveland Heights Fire Department. I am also a member of our local and regional Fire Investigation teams. I am a proponent of house bill 313 which will give the city the option of allowing their local Fire Investigators the ability to carry a side arm during fire investigative duties. I am also a proponent of these investigators being required to have the OPOTA training prior to the ability to carry a side arm in their duties.

On 12//10/2021 (FRIDAY) at 2130 hrs (9:30pm) I was dispatched to a working house fire. Here is a quick synopsis of the events that happened in the next 16 hours after that initial call.

- While arriving at the fire scene to this working house fire I called for additional assistance from Lt. DeYoung, a member of our local FIU team.
- At the chaotic scene with 8 residents watching as the house was burning, we attempted to get an initial statement from all of the tenants.
- After the fire was out and the overhaul was completed, Lt DeYoung and I started our investigation of the fire scene.
- Due to the copious amount of water and the lack of daylight, we decided to have the board up company completely board up the house windows and the side entry door and then leave us a key for the lock and hasp on the front entry door so that we could return in the morning with additional manpower, daylight and the water runoff will have stopped.
- During our Saturday morning arrival with now 3 of us, we started to dig out the fire scene. We had also found a secondary point of origin to a small fire that was nowhere near the large body of fire. This needed to be investigated to rule out an intentionally set fire.
- Our interviews on Friday night found which tenant was staying and sleeping on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor where we found the most fire damage. This gentleman stated that he was staying in the fire area.
  - o According to police on the scene on Friday night, this gentleman seemed agitated every time they tried to speak to him.
- During our investigation on that Saturday morning, we heard a loud commotion outside by the front door. All 3 of us went out the front door to see what the commotion was.
  - o We found the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor tenant walking/staggering up the front walk towards the house screaming and yelling in an out of control and unable to understand manner. The woman he was with was trying to calm him down and pull him back from walking towards the house.
  - o The 3 of us fire investigators retreated back into the front door, I radioed to our dispatch for a police response and we closed the front door.
    - Just as fast as this happened, the woman was able to redirect the gentleman and they left the property.

We were left with a bunch of “What If’s”.

- What if this man did intentionally set this fire and came back to try and cover up his evidence.
- What if this man was armed.
- What if he continued to try and make entry into the house to get rid of us investigators and cover up his evidence.
- What if he did come into the house, as we would have been trapped since all the rest of the windows and egress doors were boarded up from the night before...we were trapped.

I conclude with this.

- If House Bill 313 was in effect and our city officials recognized and supported the measure knowing that we had the required training, we could have been able to carry a side arm. We still would have retreated back into the house with the knowledge that we can now at least defend ourselves if we needed to.

Without the option of being able to protect ourselves during our investigative duties and this situation continued to go bad, it is very possible that by the time that the local police responded to the scene, they would have found 3 trapped and injured or dead fire investigators.

A scene can change in a split second, HB 313 can help protect all of Ohio Fire Investigators during their duties to serve their respective city.