

Article 79.

Investigation of Fires and Inspection of Premises.

§ 58-79-1. Fires investigated; reports; records.

The Director of the State Bureau of Investigation, through the State Bureau of Investigation, the Office of the State Fire Marshal, and the chief of the fire department, or chief of police where there is no chief of the fire department, in municipalities and towns, and the county fire marshal and the sheriff of the county and the chief of the rural fire department where such fire occurs outside of a municipality, are hereby authorized to investigate the cause, origin, and circumstances of every fire occurring in such municipalities or counties in which property has been destroyed or damaged, and shall specially make investigation whether the fire was the result of carelessness or design. A preliminary investigation shall be made by the chief of fire department or chief of police, where there is no chief of fire department in municipalities, and by the county fire marshal and the sheriff of the county or the chief of the rural fire department where such fire occurs outside of a municipality, and must be begun within three days, exclusive of Sunday, of the occurrence of the fire, and the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation, through the State Bureau of Investigation, shall have the right to supervise and direct the investigation when he deems it expedient or necessary.

The officer making the investigation of fires shall forthwith notify the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation, and must within one week of the occurrence of the fire furnish to the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation a written statement of all facts relating to the cause and origin of the fire, the kind, value and ownership of the property destroyed, and such other information as is called for by the forms provided by the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation. Departments capable of submitting the required information by the utilization of computers and related equipment, by means of an approved format of standard punch cards, magnetic tapes or an approved telecommunications system, may do so in lieu of the submission of the written statement as provided for in this section. The Director of the State Bureau of Investigation shall keep in his office a record of all reports submitted pursuant to this section. These reports shall at all times be open to public inspection. (1899, c. 58; 1901, c. 387; 1903, c. 719; Rev., s. 4818; C.S., s. 6074; 1943, c. 170; 1969, c. 894; 1977, c. 596, s. 1; 2014-100, s. 17.1(p); 2017-57, s. 22.4(a); 2018-31, s. 3.)

§ 58-79-5. Director of the State Bureau of Investigation to make examination; arrests and prosecution.

It is the duty of the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation to examine, or cause examination to be made, into the cause, circumstances, and origin of all fires occurring within the State to which his attention has been called in accordance with the provisions of G.S. 58-79-1, or by interested parties, by which property is accidentally or unlawfully burned, destroyed, or damaged, whenever in his judgment the evidence is sufficient, and to specially examine and decide whether the fire was the result of carelessness or the act of an incendiary. The Director of the State Bureau of Investigation shall, in person, by deputy or otherwise, fully investigate all circumstances surrounding such fire, and, when in his opinion such proceedings are necessary, take or cause to be taken the testimony on oath of all persons supposed to be cognizant of any facts or to have means of knowledge in relation to the matters as to which an examination is herein required to be made, and shall cause the same to be reduced in writing. If the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation or any deputy appointed to conduct such investigations, is of the opinion that there is evidence to charge any person or persons with the crime of arson, or other willful burning, or fraud in

connection with the crime of arson or other willful burning, he may arrest with warrant or cause such person or persons to be arrested, charged with such offense, and prosecuted, and shall furnish to the district attorney of the district all such evidence, together with the names of witnesses and all other information obtained by him, including a copy of all pertinent and material testimony taken in the case. (1899, c. 58, s. 2; 1901, c. 387, s. 2; 1903, c. 719; Rev., s. 4819; C.S., s. 6075; 1943, c. 170; 1955, c. 642, s. 1; 1959, c. 1183; 1973, c. 47, s. 2; 1977, c. 596, s. 2; 2014-100, s. 17.1(p).)

§ 58-79-10. Powers of Director of the State Bureau of Investigation in investigations.

The Director of the State Bureau of Investigation, or his deputy appointed to conduct such examination, has the powers of a trial justice for the purpose of summoning and compelling the attendance of witnesses to testify in relation to any matter which is by provisions of this Article a subject of inquiry and investigation, and may administer oaths and affirmations to persons appearing as witnesses before them. False swearing in any such matter or proceeding is perjury and shall be punished as such. The Director of the State Bureau of Investigation or his deputy has authority at all times of the day or night, in performance of the duties imposed by the provisions of this Article, to enter upon and examine any building or premises where any fire has occurred, and other buildings and premises adjoining or near the same. All investigations held by or under the direction of the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation or his deputy may, in their discretion, be private, and persons other than those required to be present by the provisions of this Article may be excluded from the place where the investigation is held, and witnesses may be kept apart from each other and not allowed to communicate with each other until they have been examined. (1899, c. 58, s. 3; 1901, c. 387, s. 3; Rev., s. 4820; C.S., s. 6076; 1943, c. 170; 1977, c. 596, s. 2; 2014-100, s. 17.1(p).)

§ 58-79-15. Failure to comply with summons or subpoena.

The failure of a person to comply with a summons or subpoena of the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation or his deputy under G.S. 58-79-10 shall be brought before a court of record and punished as for contempt in the same manner as if he had failed to appear and testify before said court of record. (1955, c. 642, s. 2; 1977, c. 596, s. 2; 2014-100, s. 17.1(p).)

§ 58-79-20. Inspection of premises; dangerous material removed.

The State Fire Marshal, or the chief of fire department or chief of police where there is no chief of fire department, or the city or county building inspector, electrical inspector, heating inspector, or fire prevention inspector has the right at all reasonable hours, for the purpose of examination, to enter into and upon all buildings and premises in their jurisdiction. When any of such officers find in any building or upon any premises overcrowding in violation of occupancy limits established pursuant to the North Carolina State Building Code, combustible material or inflammable conditions dangerous to the safety of such building or premises they shall order the same to be removed or remedied, and this order shall be forthwith complied with by the owner or occupant of such buildings or premises. The owner or occupant may, within twenty-four hours, appeal to the State Fire Marshal from the order, and the cause of the complaint shall be at once investigated by the State Fire Marshal's direction, and unless by the State Fire Marshal's authority the order of the officer above named is revoked it remains in force and must be forthwith complied with by the owner or occupant. The State Fire Marshal, fire chief, or building inspector, electrical inspector, heating inspector, or fire prevention inspector shall make an immediate investigation as to the presence of combustible material or the existence of inflammable conditions in any building or

upon any premises under their jurisdiction upon complaint of any person having an interest in such building or premises or property adjacent thereto. The State Fire Marshal may, in person or by deputy, visit any municipality or county and make such inspections alone or in company with the local officer. The State Fire Marshal shall submit annually, as early as consistent with full and accurate preparation, and not later than the first day of June, a detailed report of the State Fire Marshal's official action under this Article, and it shall be embodied in the report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on General Government. (1899, c. 58, s. 4; 1901, c. 387, s. 4; 1903, c. 719; Rev., s. 4821; C.S., s. 6077; 1943, c. 170; 1969, c. 1063, s. 3; 1977, c. 596, s. 4; 1985, c. 576, s. 2; 2021-180, s. 37.7(c); 2023-151, s. 11.13.)

§ 58-79-22. Door lock exemption permit.

Any business entity licensed to sell automatic weapons as a federal firearms dealer that is in the business of selling firearms or ammunition and that operates a firing range which rents firearms and sells ammunition that desires to be exempt from the door lock requirements of Chapter 10 of Volume 1 of the North Carolina State Building Code may apply for a permit to do so with the Office of the State Fire Marshal in accordance with G.S. 143-143.4 and rules adopted by the Office of the State Fire Marshal. The Office of the State Fire Marshal shall charge a permit fee of five hundred dollars (\$500.00) for the issuance of a permit issued pursuant to G.S. 143-143.4. (2001-324, s. 2; 2023-151, s. 11.14(a).)

§ 58-79-25. Deputy investigators.

It shall be the duty of the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation to appoint two or more persons as deputies, whose particular duty it shall be to investigate forest fires and endeavor to ascertain the persons guilty of setting such fires and cause prosecution to be instituted against those who, as a result of such investigation, are deemed guilty. (1899, c. 58, s. 6; 1901, c. 387, s. 6; 1903, c. 719, s. 2; Rev., s. 4823; 1915, c. 109, s. 2; 1919, c. 186, s. 7; C.S., s. 6078; Ex. Sess. 1924, c. 119; 1943, c. 170; 1977, c. 596, s. 2; 2014-100, s. 17.1(p).)

§ 58-79-30. Repealed by Session Laws 1999-456, s. 66.

§ 58-79-35. Fire prevention and Fire Prevention Day.

It is the duty of the State Fire Marshal, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the State Board of Education to provide a pamphlet containing printed instructions for properly conducting fire drills in all schools and auxiliary school buildings and the principal of every public and private school shall conduct at least one fire drill every month during the regular school session in each building in his charge where children are assembled. The fire drills shall include all children and teachers and the use of various ways of egress to assimilate evacuation of said buildings under various conditions, and such other regulations as prescribed by the State Fire Marshal, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and State Board of Education.

The State Fire Marshal and Superintendent of Public Instruction shall further provide for the teaching of "Fire Prevention" in the colleges and schools of the State, and to arrange for a textbook adapted to such use. The ninth day of October of every year shall be set aside and designated as "Fire Prevention Day," and the Governor shall issue a proclamation urging the people to a proper observance of the day, and the State Fire Marshal shall bring the day and its observance to the attention of the officials of all organized fire departments of the State, whose duty it shall be to disseminate the materials and to arrange suitable programs to be followed in its observance. (1915,

c. 166, s. 5; C.S., s. 6080; 1925, c. 130; 1943, c. 170; 1947, c. 781; 1957, c. 845; 2023-151, s. 11.15.)

§ 58-79-40. Insurance company to furnish information.

(a) The chief of any municipal fire or police department, county fire marshal or sheriff, or special agent of the State Bureau of Investigation may request any insurance company investigating a fire loss of real or personal property to release any information in its possession relative to that loss. The company shall release the information and cooperate with any official authorized to request such information pursuant to this section. The information shall include, but is not limited to:

- (1) Any insurance policy relevant to a fire loss under investigation and any application for such a policy;
- (2) Policy premium payment records;
- (3) History of previous claims made by the insured for fire loss;
- (4) Material relating to the investigation of the loss, including statements of any person, proof of loss, and any other relevant evidence.

(b) If an insurance company (or insurance agency) has reason to suspect that a fire loss to its insured's real or personal property was caused by incendiary means, the company shall furnish the State Bureau of Investigation with all relevant material acquired during its investigation of the fire loss, cooperate with and take such action as may be requested of it by any law-enforcement agency, and permit any person ordered by a court to inspect any of its records pertaining to the policy and the loss.

(c) In the absence of fraud or malice, no insurance company (or insurance agency), or person who furnishes information on its behalf, shall be liable for damages in a civil action or subject to criminal prosecution for any oral or written statement made or any other action that is necessary to supply information required pursuant to this section.

(d) The officials and departmental and agency personnel receiving any information furnished pursuant to this section shall hold the information in confidence until such time as its release is required pursuant to a criminal or civil proceeding.

(e) Any official referred to in subsection (a) of this section may be required to testify as to any information in his possession regarding the fire loss of real or personal property in any civil action in which any person seeks recovery under a policy against an insurance company for the fire loss. (1977, c. 520, s. 1.)

§ 58-79-45. Fire incident reports.

(a) Whenever a fire department responds to a fire, the chief of that department shall complete or cause to be completed a fire incident report, which report shall be on a form prescribed by the State Fire Marshal. When such report is made without fraud, bad faith, or actual malice, the person making the report is not subject to liability for libel or slander.

(b) The fire department shall forward a copy of the completed form to the fire marshal of the county in which the fire occurred. If there is no fire marshal in that county, the fire department shall forward a copy of the report to the county commissioners. The fire department shall retain the original of the report. The fire department and the fire marshal or county commissioners to whom reports are sent shall retain the reports for a period of five years.

(c) At the request of any person, the county fire marshal or county commissioners shall provide such person, for a reasonable copying charge, a certified copy of the report. (1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 1054, s. 7; 2023-151, s. 11.16.)