

# Fire Investigation Summary

# Supermarket

**Phoenix, Arizona**  
**March 14, 2001**



A fire that began in the rear of a supermarket in a multi-tenanted shopping plaza resulted in the death of a fire fighter. The fire fighter became disorientated and was eventually located deep within the building.



The fire, which began in combustibles stored outside near a loading dock, spread into the rear stock room of the supermarket. The fire fighter was on one of the initial attack hoselines when his air supply began to run low. During his attempts to exit the building he became disoriented and sounded a Mayday call.



Several attempts were made to locate and rescue this fire fighter, as the fire spread rapidly through the building.



National Fire Protection Association  
Fire Investigations Department

On March 14, 2001, at approximately 4:54 p.m., a debris fire at the rear of a shopping plaza was reported to the Phoenix Fire Department. The fire would spread into the shopping plaza and result in the death of a fire fighter and in injuries to several others.

The fire began in a pile of debris adjacent to a compactor unit in the rear of a supermarket. The supermarket was located in a shopping plaza containing several retail occupancies. The fire spread into the attic and roof spaces of the supermarket, eventually spreading throughout the store. The store was occupied at the time the fire was discovered.

A short time after the Phoenix Fire Alarm Office received notification of the fire by phone, Phoenix Fire Department units in the area reported seeing smoke in the area of 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue and McDowell Road. Engine 24 was dispatched to the area. Battalion Chief 3 also responded to the scene. [Engine 14, the unit that is normally closest to the reported address, was returning to their quarters from the repair shop with only a driver (Engineer).] The first arriving units reported smoke showing from the rear of the hardware store at that address. Further investigation showed that the burning debris was on a dock to the rear of the supermarket.

As personnel from Engine 24 begin to extinguish the exterior fire, fire fighters from Engine 14, which had since responded with a full crew, began to check for extension in adjacent occupancies. Engine 24's crew forced entry into the rear of the store and found that the fire had spread into the combustible roof and attic space/storage area.

As Engine 14's crew (Captain and three fire fighters) moved into the front of the supermarket they reported a smoke condition at the ceiling level to the incident

commander. Engine 14 then returned to the interior of the store with a hoseline and began to search for the seat of the fire near the southeast portion of the store. Engine 3 and Rescue 3 had also advanced a hoseline into the southeast corner of the store.

Visibility was reported to be worsening as Engine 14 advanced their hoseline. One fire fighter from Engine 14 reported his low-air alarm was sounding, and he was exiting the building. The Captain of Engine 14 directed the fire fighters to exit the building as a team. At this point, another of Engine 14's crew low-air alarm was sounding. During the crew's exit, two fire fighters and the Captain lost contact with the hoseline. The Captain was able to again gain contact with the hoseline and exit the building. Outside he met with one of Engine 14's fire fighters, who informed him that the other two members of the crew had not exited. It was at this point that the first distress call was heard from one of the lost fire fighters.



**View of supermarket stock room  
(NFPA)**

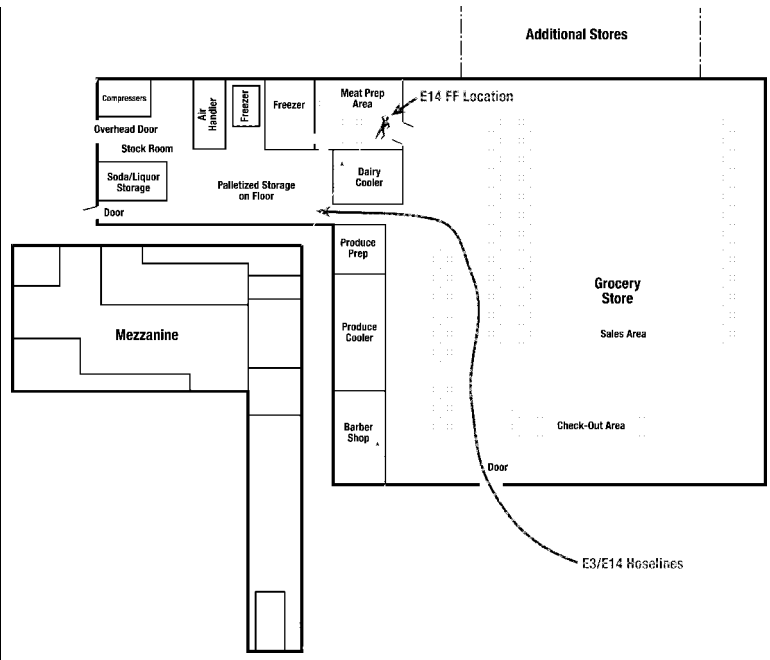
The Engine 14 Captain informed other crews of the situation and instructed them to follow the hoseline that Engine 14 had used in order to attempt to find the lost fire fighters. The Captain and remaining Engine 14 fire fighter refilled their air cylinders and also re-entered the building.

The Captain and two fire fighters from Engine 21 located one of the lost fire fighters during their search. However, they lost contact with him after attempting to lead him out of the building on the hoseline. The other lost fire fighter was able to exit with assistance from another crew own after following the sound of voices in the southeast storage room of the store.

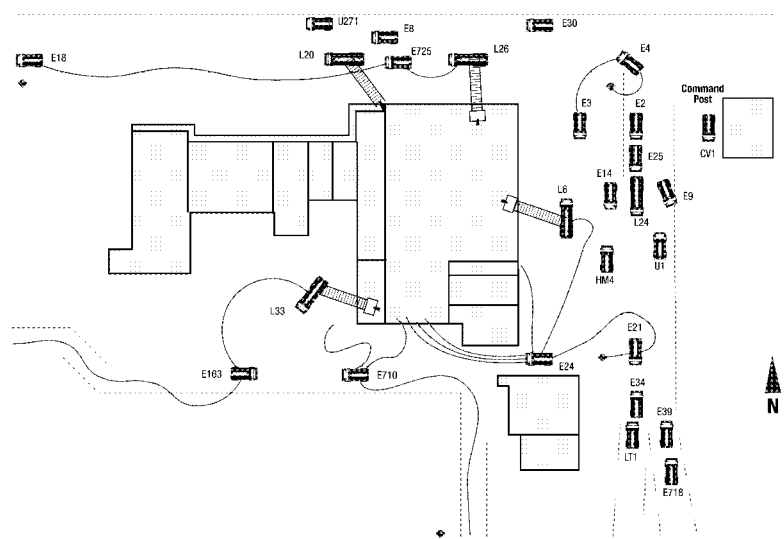
Several Rapid Intervention Crews (RICs) were sent to search for the remaining missing fire fighter, as conditions within the store worsened. Eventually the missing fire fighter was located, unconscious in the meat preparation portion of the store. Removal of the fire fighter was difficult due to his size and the obstructions located in the storage room and in the path to the exit. His removal required several additional crews. He was eventually removed through the storage room in the southeast corner of the store. He was transported to the hospital where he was pronounced dead.

This fire investigation report reviews the available facts concerning the incident and discusses them in relation to the following significant topics as they are relevant to fighting fires in larger commercial structures:

- Risk Management
- Incident Management
- Personnel Accountability
- Rapid Intervention Crews
- Pre-Fire Planning



Building Layout/FF Location



Fireground Operations

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The National Fire Protection Association's Fire Investigations Department documents some of the most significant fires and incidents throughout the world. The objective of these investigations is to determine what lessons can be learned from these incidents. The information is then made available to the fire safety community to be used in developing future codes and standards. A complete listing of reports is available, either on request or can be viewed on our Web page.

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