



# Southern Fire Forensics

Pty Limited

## THE FORENSIC FIRE INVESTIGATION SPECIALISTS TRUSTED ACROSS AUSTRALASIA

**F**ire leaves behind chaos, distortion, and unanswered questions. Beneath the ash and ruin, beyond the acrid smell and the water-stained walls, however, lies a precise sequence of events. In a house, a warehouse, a paddock, or a vehicle, fire rarely destroys without leaving evidence. To the untrained eye, it is devastation. To the forensic fire scene investigator, it is a roadmap. Fire investigation sits at the intersection of science, law, and fieldcraft. It demands a working knowledge of fire dynamics, the forensic discipline to gather and protect evidence, and the legal acuity to present findings in courts of law, often under legal scrutiny. And, the consequences of getting it wrong — for insurers, for the accused, for grieving families, and for the courts — can be significant. It is, in every sense, a discipline that calls for precision, experience, and sound judgment earned over time. It demands, above all, a level of expertise few can claim. Phil M. Glover, the Director and Principal Forensic Fire Scene Investigator at Southern Fire Forensics Pty Ltd, has spent decades in the field earning it.

With more than six decades of combined operational and forensic experience, over 7,000 formal investigations, and an international footprint spanning Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Papua New Guinea, Phil brings a depth of experience that is as rare as it is hard-earned. He is a firefighter of the highest rank, a forensic scientist, an expert witness, a licensed private investigator, an arson investigator, a trainer, and an author. These are not simply roles accumulated over time, but the result of decades spent determining fire cause and origin with precision and accountability.

### A Life Drawn Toward the Flame

Phil's connection to firefighting began well before his formal career. In November 1966, he joined his hometown fire brigade, serving alongside his father and older brother, an early experience that quietly shaped his early understanding of the job and its demands. In 1971, he transitioned into the New Zealand Fire Service as a career firefighter, beginning a 35-year operational career that would place him at the centre of thousands of fire incidents. Over time, he rose through the ranks to senior roles, including Deputy Chief Fire Officer, attending more than 10,000 fire scenes as a crew member, incident commander, and later, a post-fire investigator. This experience gave him a practical, three-dimensional understanding of fire behavior, not in controlled settings, but in real conditions, under pressure, and in constantly shifting environments. "It was always the aftermath that interested me—working out what actually happened and why," he says.

In 1989, he was formally endorsed as a Structural and Vehicle Fire Investigator by the New Zealand Fire Service and became a Member of the New Zealand Fire Brigades Institute by examination. From that point, investigation became central to his work. Through the 1990s, he contributed to training programmes across fire services and law enforcement agencies and served on the Joint NZ Police and Fire Service Arson Investigation Team, working on complex criminal fire cases. It was here, working at the intersection of forensic science and criminal justice, that Phil's instincts for the investigative process were truly honed.



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## **Phil M. Glover**

**Director and Principal Investigator at Southern Fire Forensics Pty Ltd**

### **From Public Service to Independent Authority**

In 1999, Phil stepped away from uniformed service and established himself as a self-employed fire and accident investigator, conducting forensic fire scene investigations across New Zealand’s North Island for the insurance industry. Within a short period, he built a reputation among insurers, barristers, and solicitors as a meticulous and reliable investigator. That reputation led to his recruitment by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Victoria, Australia. In 2001, he relocated to Gippsland, taking on senior operational roles while also serving as Gippsland Area Fire Investigation Coordinator, overseeing significant investigations across the region. During this period, his forensic credentials deepened further. He undertook specialist training with Victoria Police and strengthened his understanding of the legal frameworks governing forensic evidence. His work increasingly extended into formal reporting and expert witness engagements across District, County, High, and Coroners Courts.

### **The Birth of Southern Fire Forensics**

In April 2006, Phil stepped away from institutional roles after forty years of active operational fire service to establish his own forensic fire investigation practice. What began as Phil M. Glover Fire Forensics evolved into Southern Fire Forensics Pty Ltd, a specialist forensic investigation practice now operating across Australasia.

The firm is, in many respects, the distillation of everything Phil has learned across his decades of service. “Our mission is to provide objective, defensible, and court-ready reports that support insurers, legal professionals, and regulators across Australia and the South Pacific,” asserts Phil. “With internationally recognised expertise and decades of operational leadership, we deliver investigations that withstand the highest evidential and judicial scrutiny and standards,” he adds.

Today, Southern Fire Forensics is engaged by a number of Australia’s leading insurance companies as a panel investigator, and its reports have been instrumental in establishing third-party liability, initiating recovery proceedings, and successfully resolving complex claims across a wide range of fire scenarios. Now approaching its twentieth year of independent operation, it has become one of Australasia’s leading private forensic fire investigation practices, with a strategically located team of investigators capable of reaching any fire scene across Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, the ACT, and New Zealand. Southern Fire Forensics has built a multidisciplinary team of specialists whose combined expertise strengthens the firm’s ability to undertake complex fire investigations. Phil remains closely involved in each investigation, overseeing and quality-assuring the work to ensure consistency and accuracy. To date, the firm has conducted more than



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7,000 forensic fire investigations across residential, commercial, and industrial environments, in Australia and internationally, including Malaysia, Singapore, and Papua New Guinea.

### **A Disciplined Approach to Fire Investigation**

What sets Phil apart is not simply the scale of his experience, but the discipline and consistency of his analytical approach. Fire investigation requires each scene to be treated with the rigour of a crime scene, regardless of whether a criminal act is suspected. Evidence must be identified, documented, and preserved before any conclusions are drawn. In Phil’s work, conclusions follow from evidence, not the other way around. This commitment to methodical investigation forms the foundation of every report produced by Southern Fire Forensics. His clients—including insurers, legal professionals, police, regulators, and courts—rely on this level of precision when assessing cause, liability, and risk. Beyond scene investigation, the practice also extends to forensic research and advisory work, providing evidence-based insights that support regulatory compliance and help clients understand potential exposure before matters escalate to litigation, in many cases, saving significant legal costs. “Our clients have commented favourably on our attention to detail, which we strive to achieve at all times when conducting a scene examination, obtaining evidence, and compiling reports,” shares Phil.

### **Notable Investigation: Lake Ohau, New Zealand, 2019**

When a large vegetation fire swept through the Lake Ohau region of New Zealand, destroying 54 homes and triggering one of the largest insurance claims in the country’s recent history—approaching \$58 million—Phil Glover was engaged to conduct the forensic investigation. His findings provided the evidentiary foundation upon which the claim was pursued. Across two decades of private practice, Phil’s investigations have addressed fires causing damages ranging from hundreds of thousands to tens of millions of dollars, including a \$15 million power station disaster in Morwell, a \$22 million commercial complex fire in New South Wales, and a \$15 million warehouse loss in Victoria. His work has also included a critical power generation system failure at a major Singapore airport and large-scale factory fire investigations in Kuala Lumpur.

### **Proving the Evidence**

The courtroom is, in many respects, the ultimate test of any forensic investigation. It is not enough to determine what happened at a fire scene; the findings must be clearly articulated, rigorously defended, and withstand detailed scrutiny under cross-examination. This is where Phil’s operational background sets him apart. Having attended and led responses across more than 10,000 fire incidents, his understanding of fire behaviour is grounded in real-world experience—something that matters when



evidence is challenged. With more than 40 expert witness appearances across District, County, High, and Coroners Courts in New Zealand and Australia, Phil has played a key role in establishing liability, securing recovery from third parties, and supporting the prosecution of arson and fraud cases. The firm's reports have been instrumental in attributing liability to faulty appliances and negligence, establishing arson, and resolving insurance claims that might otherwise have remained contested. "Alongside giving evidence, we review and assess other investigators' reports and provide independent opinions to insurers and their legal teams," explains Phil.

He works in accordance with the Expert Witness Codes of Conduct across Australian jurisdictions, requiring independence, objectivity, and a duty to the court above all else—principles that underpin his approach to every case. Courts have also appointed Phil as an independent expert to review evidence presented by parties to litigation—a role that demands the highest standard of objectivity.

### **Fire: The Flamin' Facts**

In 2014, Phil published *Fire: The Flamin' Facts*, a book five years in the making, rooted in four decades of lived investigative experience. It is not a conventional fire safety manual, though it functions as the best of its kind. It

is part biography, part forensic case study, part reference text, a book that takes the reader from the fundamental science of combustion through real-world fire events, personal accounts, and hard-won lessons from a career most people will never come close to experiencing. The book has drawn strong praise from readers who describe it as essential reading for businesses, laboratories, fire stations, and manufacturing facilities.

### **Continuing, Grounded in the Same Principles**

What drives someone to spend over six decades returning to fire scenes, long after the flames are out? Partly discipline, no doubt. Partly experience. But at its core, it is a consistent commitment to understanding cause with clarity and precision, an approach that continues to define Phil's work today.

Even after decades in the field, his work remains grounded in the same principles that have shaped his career from the outset—careful observation, disciplined analysis, and a focus on evidence above all else. As the demands on forensic investigation continue to evolve, Southern Fire Forensics continues to support complex investigations across Australia, combining decades of operational experience with disciplined forensic analysis and court-ready reporting.