

Claims Education

INTERNATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE *e*magazine

TRAINING || TALK

Greetings Claims Education Magazine readers. We hope that all of you are staying safe and healthy during these trying times.

In this issue we feature a story about Herndon & Associates, a pioneer in the vehicle fire investigation industry. You'll learn about some of the cool things they are doing to support advancements in vehicle fire investigations.

We also sat down (virtually, of course) with Shawn Knauts, VP of Claims and Lyn Scrivner, Regional Claims Director of Shelter Insurance to talk about what makes their company special, including high employee satisfaction as well as top marks in customer service.

Until we can train in person again, we continue to offer online insurance training. Check out pages 8-9 for more information.

Finally, we are very excited and proud to introduce our latest publication, *Awesome Claims Customer Service – Part 1* written by Carl Van and Jon Coscia. This collaborative effort between Carl and Jon was a labor of love and we are delighted to share it with you. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as they enjoyed writing it!

International Insurance Institute welcomes your contributions to CEM and we encourage you to contact Lisa Ferrier at lisa@insuranceinstitute.com for any input. Please feel free to direct any questions, feedback, articles, claims success stories, and/ or even topics that you would like to see discussed in the magazine. ■



Carl Van
President and
CEO International Insurance Institute

FEATURE || STORY

HERNDON & ASSOCIATES: IN THE LINE OF FIRE

It's true that the majority of investigation firms across the country investigate fires; however, they mainly focus on commercial structural fires, which can be quite different than vehicle fires. Herndon and Associates is one of the few firms in the U.S. that specialize in vehicle fires. Founded in 1979 by Walter Herndon, current COO Tim Herndon's father, Herndon & Associates has built a solid reputation in the insurance industry.

"...the best way to learn this business is by doing it day in and day out – on the job training."

Walter, Tim and their associates pioneered vehicle fire investigations in Michigan and across the country. Although Tim does have a multitude of credentials, including a Criminal Justice degree from Schoolcraft College as well as a degree in Fire Science, which he earned in 2001, he claims the best way to learn this business is by doing, "True that there is a lot of science involved, but the best way to learn this business is by doing it day in and day out – on the job training"

This specialized knowledge of vehicle fires has led to a strong partnership between Latitude Subrogation Services and Herndon & Associates. Together they created the Vehicle Investigation Recovery Program, VIRP, where Tim helps Lat-



Tim Herndon, Herndon & Associates



itude determine if a vehicle fire has any subrogation potential. Tim enjoys working with Latitude and says of the partnership, “Working with Latitude Subrogation Services over the years has truly offered all of our clients a one stop shop experience. Latitude employees are the most highly skilled and trained of any organization I have partnered with.” On numerous occasions, due to a proper fire investigation having been conducted by Herndon & Associates, along with their relationship and mutual respect for opposing manufacturer engineer/investigators, paired with Latitude’s overall handling of the claim process, the client’s subrogation demands were settled in an unprecedented timely manner.

In addition to their experience and knowledge, Herndon & Associates has over \$100k in diagnostic tools that allow them to capture electronic information and aid in their investigations. This electronic information helps them to determine things like if there was forced entry into a vehicle, if the sys-

tem was compromised, or if it was intact and functioning at the time of the theft or fire. Newer technology in vehicles, such as geolocation, also provides the opportunity to see where the vehicle was and what was it doing along the way prior to an accident, or a reported theft, similar to a black box from an airplane crash. According to Tim, “Fire investigation is really a process of elimination. There’s only a handful of possibilities, which you learn as you go, but events leading up to a fire or accident can help narrow it down to a few causes.”

Tim says that at least half of the investigations that Herndon & Associates is hired for are to determine if fraud is involved. Their job is to figure out if someone intentionally burned their vehicle, paid someone to burn their vehicle or, if there is a claim of theft, if the claimant has an alliance with an auto body shop to produce a fraudulent claim. They can also determine in an accidental fire if there is someone or something responsible for the fire such as a recent repair



that was performed, a manufacturing defect or perhaps an after-market install of equipment.

“It doesn’t help to hire someone who primarily investigates houses and buildings to look at a vehicle fire.”

On top of their arsenal of diagnostic tools, Herndon & Associates also performs live burn demonstrations a couple of times a year. They will get brand-new vehicles donated which they then set on fire in various ways, usually at a local salvage yard such as Copart. Tim says it’s a good learning experience, “We’ll get upwards of 100 people to attend our live burn demonstrations including local law enforcement, firefighters, and insurance investigators. Most watch in amazement as we burn a brand-new vehicle. Many times they’ll offer their own old vehicle for us to burn instead,” he explains with a chuckle, “but if we

burned old vehicles all of the time, we wouldn’t understand how the new vehicles respond to a fire.” During the live burn, the Fire Department is on standby, and when they do extinguish the fire, it provides a lot of useful information such as why does it take so long to put out certain types of fires versus others.

Tim’s biggest piece of advice for adjusters who are working on an investigation is to hire the right expert for the task. When doing a vehicle fire investigation, for example, it’s important to find someone who has the knowledge and experience to help make the right call, “It doesn’t help to hire someone who primarily investigates houses and buildings to look at a vehicle fire. The best approach is to say, “Let’s narrow this thing down and get the right expert for the job.” ■

Herndon & Associates corporate office is located in Livonia, Michigan. They can be reached at (800) 961-2909 or info@herndon-assoc.com.