



B130 Cooperation Amongst Professionals: A Complex Case Study of a Suspicious Fire in Southern China

*Sheilah E. Hamilton, PhD**, University of Glamorgan, School of Applied Sciences, Pontypridd, Wales CF37 1DL, United Kingdom; *Zennon C.P. Cheng*, Zennon & Pierre Marine Services, Ltd., 5/F Greatmany Centre, 109-115 Queen's Road East, Hong Kong, SAR PRC

The goal of this presentation is to show how the successful investigation of an unusual and complex international fraud case, spanning three different countries, relied on the input of professionals with greatly differing skills and experience before the scam was confirmed.

This presentation will demonstrate how the same skills used by forensic professionals in criminal cases can be used in the investigation of civil enquiries. It also underlines the importance of co-operation between different disciplines.

During the early morning of 7 February 1999 a burning container vehicle was reported at the foot of a steep slope at the side of the main road in a remote area between Panyu City and Shunde in Guangdong province, Southern China. The vehicle consisted of a tractor, trailer and a container which was reputed to contain 7,500 state-of-the-art PC mother boards which had originated in Taiwan and been transhipped to Hong Kong before arriving on the Chinese mainland.

Initially the fire was attended by local Chinese fire and police officers who took two photographs but were not qualified to investigate the cause of the fire. The driver of the vehicle had disappeared and was never located. Later the same day the tractor, trailer, container and ~25% of the cargo of mother boards were removed to a nearby police pound where they remained until the tractor, trailer and mother boards were claimed on payment of a fine for damage to surrounding crops at the location of the accident. The empty container was not claimed and remained at the police pound.

On March 31, 1999, a change in survey personnel occurred and the new investigation team included the current authors. Despite the passage of time, when the scene of the fire was visited approximately 500 mother boards remained strewn on the ground and these were collected for further examination together with other potentially useful items such as wrapping material.

The investigation team included a fire investigator/forensic scientist, a chartered surveyor and a computer expert. The different skills of each member were needed to determine that this was an elaborate fraud which, had the insurance claim been upheld, would have resulted in the payment of a large amount of money.

This presentation will show the different reasons why the authors concluded that (1) the fire was a deliberate act, and (2) the value of the motherboards was a small fraction of that claimed.

Fraud, China, Cooperation