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EXPERT PROFILE

"THE INVESTIGATION PROCESS CAN ASSIST IN REDUCING RISKS AND IMPROVING SAFETY."

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Partner, Burgoynes LLP.

What is your role and where do you work?

I am a Partner at Burgoynes' London office.

What is your expertise, specialism or main area of interest?

I trained as a chemical engineer at Nottingham University and since joining Burgoynes in 1999, I have been investigating incidents involving fires, explosions, chemicals, process plant and personal injuries. These investigations vary in size and complexity from small domestic incidents to large complex industrial plants and ships. I have investigated over 1,000 incidents throughout the world during my career.

Is there a particular aspect of your work you are interested in or passionate about?

I am passionate about finding out the real causes of incidents, that investigations are being undertaken thoroughly and accurately to provide correct, as well as commercially appropriate advice to our clients. The investigation process can assist in reducing risks and improving safety, by identifying faults in design and production of appliances and highlighting inadequacies in safety procedures.

What are you working on currently?

At any one time, I am involved in multiple investigations, at various stages of the claims cycle, from initial scene investigation to litigation. I am currently working on several large explosions and fire incidents, both industrial and domestic.

The reliance on our electricity network for electric heating systems and charging electric vehicles is likely to cause additional fires.

What topics and trends are emerging in the sector?

The spread of the types of incidents we investigate varies with technological advances and lifestyle trends. For example, the push towards green energy has led to more fires involving solar panels, combustible insulation and cladding. The reliance on our electricity network for electric heating systems and charging electric vehicles is likely to cause additional fires. There is an increasing prevalence of stored energy (mainly batteries) in everyday life, notably for transport and electronic technology. Hazards caused by poor manufacturing and design practices, incorrect charging regimes and damage during use, are causing more fires. With developing technology, it can take time before relevant regulations cover emergent safety issues.

In the past year or so, due to COVID-19, there has been a marked change in our lifestyles, with more home working and more empty commercial premises. Our experience is that home working has resulted in fewer severe domestic fires. This is probably due to people discovering fires earlier in their development, minimising damage. Conversely, we have seen larger fires in unoccupied commercial units, where fires can develop undiscovered. There is also a worrying increase in these premises being used for illegal activity, such as cannabis cultivation. It will be interesting to see what happens to the loss profile when life returns to a new normality of blended working. ●

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Founded in 1968, Burgoynes is an international partnership specialising in the investigation of fires, explosions and other major incidents. Burgoynes' expert forensic scientists and engineers advise clients across the legal, insurance and commercial sectors, including loss adjusters, insurance brokers, solicitors, police forces, government departments and industrial corporations.
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