



HALLIWELL

NIKOLA SUTAROV

BSC (FORENSIC SCIENCE)

DIRECTOR - FORENSIC SERVICES ANZ

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

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SPECIALTIES

- Forensic Fire & Explosion Investigation
- Fire Dynamics
- Fire Debris Analysis
- Plant & Equipment Fires
- Gas Explosions
- Major and Complex losses
- Vessel Fires
- Expert Opinion & Testimony

BIOGRAPHY

Nik is an accomplished Forensic Investigator with scientific qualifications and an insurance background. He has training and experience in the fields of forensic investigation and scene investigation, specialising in fire and explosion investigations. Nik has conducted examinations of structural and mechanical fires throughout Australia, including residential, commercial, and industrial structures, as well as industrial gas explosions, motor vehicles, boats, heavy equipment, manufacturing processes, electrical fire causation, and electrical systems (including AC and DC equipment and circuits).

Nik has strong insurance knowledge gained while working for one of Australia's largest Insurance companies. His insurance knowledge allows him to consider compliance, underwriting and non-disclosure issues when examining fires and making enquiries.

He also has a family background in the transportation industry, which adds to his experience in compliance with the storage and transportation of dangerous goods.

Nik possesses in-depth knowledge of digital forensic photography, which he acquired through his tertiary education and a passion for photography.

QUALIFICATIONS

- Bachelor of Science (Forensic Science) – University of Western Sydney
- Fire Debris Analysis – University of Central Florida
- Cert III Financial Services – FINSIA
- IAAI – Motor Vehicle Fire Investigation course
- National Course in Asbestos Awareness

INDUSTRY MEMBERSHIPS

- Affiliate member and Certified Insurance Professional (CIP) with the Australian and New Zealand Institute of Insurance and Finance (ANZIIF).
- Member of the International Association of Arson Investigators.

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- Member of the NSW Association of Fire Investigators.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Halliwell – Director (Forensic Services ANZ) – (April 2025 – Current)
- Halliwell – Principal Consultant East (2022 – April 2025)
- GKA Investigation Group – Fire Investigator/Senior Fire Investigator (2014 – 2022)
- SMSN Transport – Operations Manager (2013 – 2014)
- Insurance Australia Group (IAG-NRMA) – Senior Workforce Planner, Team Leader, Consultant (2012 – 2013)
- NRMA Insurance – Consultant & Team Leader (2008 – 2012)

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In addition to my role as Director of Halliwell Fire Services ANZ, I continue to conduct forensic examinations of major and complex fire scenes, including domestic, commercial, and industrial fires and explosions, as well as industrial machinery, farming equipment, battery farms, light and heavy vehicles, boats, and arson fires.

The DPP used my findings and professional report in a successful criminal prosecution. I was called and accepted as an Expert Witness to the Supreme Court of NSW, where I also provided evidence in chief in a large industrial fire. Through this case, I successfully determined the cause of the fire and demonstrated my findings by testing my hypothesis.

In addition to my scene examination, I routinely provide expert opinion in the field of fire and explosion investigation. I have authored numerous specialist opinion reports that have been used in litigation for both recovery and liability cases.

As a forensic fire examiner, I routinely work with underwriters, claim personnel, law enforcement professionals, Loss Adjusters, fire brigade personnel, and Insureds to ensure I obtain the evidence and information necessary to provide advice to my clients regarding any policy concerns, subrogated recovery, or liability exposure.

HALLIWELL | Director of Forensic Services Australia and New Zealand (ANZ)

(APRIL 2025– CURRENT)

As a Director for Halliwell Forensic Services ANZ, I remain active as a Senior Forensic Examiner and continue to support and coach the teams of Examiners in both countries.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Setting strategic direction for the Forensic Services ANZ teams
- Overseeing Strategy Execution
- Appointing and Evaluating Senior leadership: Principal Consultants from ANZ
- Ensuring adequate resources and training programs
- Maintaining proper financial records
- Promote ethical behaviours
- Maintaining stakeholder relationships
- Responsible for budget delivery
- strategic planning goals
- Leading and coaching of Forensic Investigations.
- Leading and participating in projects and delivering against the project plan, including time and scope
- Generate proposals, plans, and scopes for new investigation matters to varying levels of complexity
- Cost Estimates and project cost management
- Developing training programs
- Quality assurance on scene examination and reports

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- Authorising reports
- Teams performance management
- Reporting to stakeholders on team performance, business performance and new clients
- Maintaining strong day-to-day relationships with clients and client executives on projects
- Business Development and implementation of key company strategies
- Understanding clients' needs and providing solutions to clients. Sourcing and appointing suitable resources and consultants
- Recommending and implementing suitable strategies, approaches or options based on the client's needs, analysis and complexity
- Multi-disciplinary project management
- Management of Teams KPI
- Workforce planning
- Management of internal and external experts to meet the projects objectives
- Lead and Coach Forensic Fire Examination to existing and new staff
- Senior Investigator for major loss fires
- Providing Expert Reports
- Acting as Senior Forensic Examiner to assist with work overflow

HALLIWELL | Principal Consultant East

(NOVEMBER 2022 – APRIL 2025)

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Managing and leading a team of 11 Investigators, Examiners and Engineers.
- Leading and coaching of Forensic Investigations.
- Leading and participating in projects and delivering against the project plan, including time and scope
- Generate proposals, plans, and scopes for new investigation matters to varying levels of complexity
- Cost Estimates and project cost management
- Developing training programs
- Quality assurance on scene examination and reports
- Authorising reports
- Teams performance management
- Reporting to stakeholders on team performance, business performance and new clients
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GKA INVESTIGATIONS GROUP | Senior Forensic Fire Examiner (MAY 2014 – NOVEMBER 2022)

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Principal examiner for high-profile and complex fire scenes to conduct Origin and Cause Examinations
- Expert in the delivery of high-quality and detailed Investigation Reports (origin and cause, legal, expert advice)
- Identification of physical and circumstantial evidence
- Collect and label evidence and maintain the chain of custody
- Collection of samples for laboratory analysis and testing for the presence of accelerants and oils
- Digital scene recording (video and photography)
- Detailed reconnaissance (locality and floor plan drawings)
- Identification of non-compliant claims and breach of Australian Standards
- Assess information and make professional recommendations to clients, based on available forensic evidence
- Liaise with lawyers, loss adjusters, claims staff and underwriters from major insurance companies in Australia and globally.
- Conduct interviews with fire personnel, police authorities, claimants, material witnesses and associated industry experts.
- Operate case management systems
- Conduct Dextop assessments

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

During my 11.5 years as a Fire and Explosion Investigator, I have investigated over 800 fires and have been associated with an additional 200 fires as part of Dextop investigations and as an associate examiner at scenes.

My expert findings led to the determination of non-compliance to Australian Standards, negligence, human intervention, equipment failure and deliberate fires. The majority of these cases were litigated for recovery of loss exposure based on my findings. Listed below are some of the more prominent cases that I was solely responsible for determining the root cause and origin.

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ACHIEVEMENTS & NOTABLE ASSIGNMENTS

- **Industrial Fire Investigation – Seven Hills, NSW**

Presented at educational seminars on a \$50M industrial fire, including cause investigation, along with post-incident modelling and testing, to the New South Wales Association of Fire Investigators at the Fire & Rescue NSW field testing laboratory. Modelling and test results confirmed findings and led to all fire services in Australia being alerted to this type of fire cause. Selected to present the findings at the 2020 International Association of Arson Investigators International Training Conference in Las Vegas Nevada, USA. I have co-authored a journal article detailing the hypothesis published in both the IAAI and The Forensic Journal and provided evidence in chief at the Supreme Court of NSW.

- **Recycling Facility – Hume, ACT**

Investigation of the cause and origin of a fire at a major recycling facility, including evaluation of the physical evidence to identify where the fire developed from, the intensity and the effect on the building structure and recycling facility plant & equipment. Further examination and condition assessment (including metallurgical assessment) to assess the suitability of plant and equipment for restoration.

- **Shopping / Commercial Facility Gas Explosion – Canberra, ACT**

Investigation of the cause and origin of a fire at a major gas explosion, causing substantial property damage, with explosion damage reaching buildings over 200 meters from the area of origin. The investigation included identifying the source of the explosion, the circumstances surrounding the event, and identifying liability and recovery issues.

- **Chemical Recycling Plant Fire – Rooty Hill, NSW**

Investigation of the cause and origin a fire at a chemical recycling facility, including evaluation of the physical evidence to identify where the fire developed from, including the fuel and ignition sources available and the mechanisms involved in the handling process.

- **Vehicle Fire Investigation – Sydney, NSW**

Investigation of the cause and origin a vehicle fire that led to the identification of faulty electronics associated with the braking system, which led to a major vehicle manufacturer instigating a safety recall.

- **Bus Fire – Sydney, NSW**

Investigation of the cause and origin of a bus fire and further examination into the failure of the automatic fire extinguishment system to operate. Identified a fault in an electronic circuit, which led to a design modification being implemented by the manufacturer.

- **Lithium Battery Farm – QLD**

Investigation of the cause and origin of a lithium battery mega pack, part of a large battery farm.

- **Medical Waste Recycling Plant fire – Melbourne, VIC**

Complex investigation of the cause and origin of an industrial fire at a Medical Waste Recycling plant. The examination identified the proximate cause of the fire. We worked with the client to identify potential weaknesses in their systems to prevent future fires.

- **Pet Food Factory Fire – NSW**

The forensic examination identified the cause of the fire, contrary to the initial findings of others. A multidisciplinary approach was applied to demonstrate the mechanisms of failure that led to the fire.

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- **Commercial fire to RSL Club – Matraville, NSW**
Fire at the RSL Club resulted in 10 million dollars worth of damage. The cause of the fire was due to Human negligence (smoking).
- **Sporting Centre – Sydney Olympic Park, NSW**
A fire at a sporting ground resulted in \$14 million worth of damage. The cause of the fire was due to non-compliance with Australian Standards (hot works).
- **Major Restaurant fire – Sydney, NSW (NYE-2016/17)**
A Fire at the Four Seasons Hotel Sydney resulted in 8 million dollars' worth of damage due to non-compliance with the installation of the kitchen exhaust system.
- **Commercial restaurant Explosion and Fire – Earlwood, NSW**
A large explosion caused significant damage to a commercial pizza restaurant on a busy Sydney Road. The explosion was caused by leaking Natural gas, which was supplied to the restaurant. The investigation identified compliance issues with the installation of the gas pipes within the restaurant, where pipes were installed without protection through concrete. As a result, the acid from the concrete had caused a chemical reaction and erosion to the copper pipes.
- **Residential Unit Explosion – Bondi, NSW**
A major explosion involving LPG gas caused major structural damage to a residential building as well as significantly injuring the occupants. The investigation involved the examination of the gas system for the building and cooking appliances. The investigation successfully determined the source of the gas responsible for the explosion, which was introduced through improper installation and use of a Portable LPG gas cylinder in a heater.
- **Residential House Explosion - Rural NSW**
A major explosion occurred due to a leak of LPG gas from a domestic stove, resulting in significant structural damage to the dwelling. The investigation successfully identified the source of the leak at the rear of the stove.

INSURANCE AUSTRALIA GROUP (NRMA) | Senior Workforce Planner, Team Leader (JAN 2012 – JAN 2013)

- Allocating resources - using the Call Management System (CMS) and Workforce Management System (WMS) to manage leave and overtime and create fortnightly rosters that maximise business and staffing needs.
- Monitoring call flows and the performance of telephone business consultants to ensure that service levels are maintained.
- Providing real-time support, training and technical assistance to Sales and Service Business.
- Assisting the operations manager with all recruitment needs to ensure that optimal staffing is maintained.
- Providing sound recommendations to influence management's decision-making, strategy and tactical options.
- Assisting management with expense budgeting.
- Conducting monthly leave and salary audits for 200+ staff, including management;
- Managing effective internal and external relationships.
- Analysing results on a weekly and monthly basis and liaising with stakeholders.

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- Decision making for immediate changes based on daily/weekly/monthly forecast.
- Comprehensive knowledge of the Cisco Telephone operating system and advance knowledge in CISCO telephone reporting.
- Liaising information to management and stakeholders.

INSURANCE AUSTRALIA GROUP (NRMA) | Consultant Sale & Service & Team Leader **(MAR 2008 – JAN 2012)**

- Providing exemplary customer service: educating customers of relevant information and timeframes, addressing customer needs and handling objections
- Generating quotes and up-selling by recognising insurance improvements to customer policies;
- Treating all information received in the strictest confidence
- Additional responsibilities as Acting Team Leader (performed on an ad-hoc basis):
- Management of the Queue to assist and enable the team to achieve a high grade of service;
- Managing team staffing;
- Facilitating and participating in Sales and Service meetings;
- Disseminating relevant information and news to ensure all employees are aware of upcoming events, business developments and changes in business practices;
- Promote and encourage team members to meet their Key Performance Indicators as individuals and as a team;
- Analysing month-to-date performance reports;
- Delivering behavioural reports and group summaries to Business Unit Manager;
- Ongoing coaching and identifying training and development requirements;
- Recognising individual and team achievements of service excellence.

KEY ACHEIVEMENTS

- Extensive understanding of call centre logistics and telephony processes;
- Proven record in exceeding all key performance indicators;
- Strong time management and organisation skills.
- Comprehensive knowledge of insurance products across the board and underwriting guidelines.
- Consistently delivered exemplary customer service to exceed customer expectations and ensure the success of the business;