3.2 Seeking Answers to the Burning Question: 
Review of a Fire Death in German Police Cell
Alfredo E Walker

Learning Objectives
At the end of the presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Recall and explain the forensic pathology approach to the investigation of a body recovered from a fire scene.
2. Recall the pathological features of death from the effects of fire.
3. Explain the need to have an open mind in the approach to the investigation of bodies recovered from the scene of a fire.
4. Describe the potential of for miscarriage of justice when flawed investigations are conducted.

Abstract
In January 2005, the severely burnt (charred) body of a male asylum seeker was discovered in a completely tiled police cell (floor and walls) in small town in Germany. The body was shackled by the wrists and ankles to the metallic frame of a single bed (left wrist and both ankles) and wall (right wrist) by extremely short lengths of chain such that flexion of the upper and lower limbs from their fully extended positions was virtually impossible. The decedent had been placed in the cell and shackled as described on a fire-resistant mattress, subsequent to having been arrested for disorderly behavior and being a public nuisance.

From the onset, the death was treated as a case of fatal self-harming and its investigation was treated as such. Postmortem examination conducted the same day established that the decedent had been alive at the outset of the fire and had died from the effects of the fire whilst he had been in an intoxicated state. Three days after the incident, a partially melted cigarette lighter was allegedly discovered in the forensic laboratory amongst fire debris recovered from under the body. Based on this, the death was believed to have been one of intentional self-immolation that was initiated by the lighter and was reported to the public as such. A public outcry occurred and protests erupted. No formal fire investigation of the scene had occurred and it was reported that no accelerants had been detected.

The self-immolation theory was the official position of the German authorities until the death was externally reviewed 8 years later (2013) by a team of forensic experts (forensic pathologist, fire scientists x 2, toxicologist) from the United Kingdom and Canada at the request of a group which had been continually lobbying for justice since 2005. It was believed that the decedent had been killed by the police. A police officer had been convicted for negligent manslaughter in 2011. At the request of the lobby group, the forensic review team presented its findings publicly in 2015 via a press conference. This presentation will review the pathological findings and summarise the chronology of events associated with this very high profile case to illustrate how the results of the external forensic review changed the official position of the German
authorities on its offered manner of death. Despite this, any further criminal investigation was shut down.