Development of a fire in an enclosure can usually be divided into three phases:

- an ignition and growth phase
- the fully developed fire (Figure 1)
- decay and eventual burnout.

Each or these can be subdivided or elaborated on depending on the specific fire scenario. Figure 2 illustrates the different phases of a fire in an open environment or large space.

Ignition and growth phase

Most accidental fires begin as a small fire; this may be due to a hot object (e.g., an overheating electrical component), a smouldering item (e.g., smoking materials) or a naked flame. Where there is a smouldering fire, it may take a substantial time...