

Arson Prevention



The number of fires occurring in vacant structures has increased in recent months generating an awareness of potential arson for profit. Ironically, the national theme for this year's National Arson Awareness Week is "Arson for Profit", which is a criminal method of obtaining money from a fire loss insurance policy. "Arson fires throughout the country are on the rise and the Bristol Fire/Rescue Public Information Division is providing prevention tips aimed at reducing or eliminating arson fires", said Bristol Tennessee Fire Chief Bob Barnes.

Arson is the 2nd leading cause of residential fire deaths and accounts for 25% of all fires in the United States. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), in 2005, an estimated 323,900 intentional fires reported to U.S. fire departments resulted in 490 civilian fire deaths, 3 firefighter on duty deaths (at the scene of, during response or return to, or from an intentional fire), 1,500 civilian fire injuries, 7,600 firefighter on duty injuries (at the scene of an intentional fire but not including response/return injuries) and \$1.102 billion in direct property damage. The average dollar loss for all types of arson was \$17,289 with losses from arson to structures averaging \$32,364 and average losses of \$7,890 per vehicular arson. Arsons of industrial and manufacturing structures resulted in the highest average dollar losses—an average of \$114,699 per arson.

Fires at abandoned and vacant buildings are dangerous in more ways than one. Not only do these blazes cause more firefighter injuries than in any other property classification, they also damage nearby homes and businesses and destroy the fabric of the community. Whether the buildings are abandoned or vacant, more than 70 percent of the fires occurring in them are incendiary or suspicious. Even worse, these fires caused almost 9 percent of all firefighter deaths from 1994 to 2003.

Arsonists are motivated to create their crime by a myriad of reasons, such as; to conceal crimes, jealousy, political activism, revenge, spite, thrills and vandalism. Whether or not you're a potential arson target, you should take the following steps to reduce the chances of becoming a victim of arson. External and internal security such as locks, alarms, and monitoring equipment can deter an arsonist. Arsonists, like burglars, fear light. Be sure to have sufficient lighting and do not provide cover for the arsonists.

- Secure and monitor unoccupied and abandoned buildings.
- Eliminate potential fuels by removing trash, debris, and other combustible materials.
- Install security items such as locks, fire alarms, and monitoring equipment.
- Secure doors and windows, especially basements, garage, and first floors to stop easy access.
- Immediately report any questionable activities to the proper authorities.
- Illuminate the exterior and entrances so an arsonist has no place to hide.
- Keep dumpsters at least 10 feet, or even further if possible, from buildings and roof overhangs.
- Maintain and remove overgrown shrubs and signs that could hide an intruder.
- Lock and secure your vehicles.
- Teach children about the serious consequences of fire, and in particular, arson.

Arson is a crime and is punishable by law; but **ARSON** is preventable. "With better equipment, better training and improved technology, the chances of tracking down fire starters have increased drastically; however, the losses from intentionally set fires have not decreased", state Assistant Chief and Fire Marshal Jack Spurgeon. It takes more than detection to stop this crime; it takes awareness, plus the dedication of the community through prevention. "Remember, arson creates blighted neighborhoods, job losses, insurance premium increases, and irreplaceable personal property losses", added Spurgeon. Bristol Fire Rescue staff encourages everyone to become aware of and to practice fire safe behavior. National Arson Awareness Week is from May 3rd through May 9th.