

Arson Awareness Week: May 7 – 13, 2006
“Wildfire Arson – Preparedness and Prevention”

This year’s theme: Wildfire Arson – Preparedness and Prevention, draws attention to the need for property owners, fire service organizations and local business and government leaders to come together to prevent, mitigate and prepare for wildland arson fires to prevent further loss of lives and property. Arson is a serious and deadly crime. Every year, deliberately set fires cause millions of dollars worth of property loss resulting in hundreds of deaths. According to the National Fire Protection Association, during 2003 an estimated 37,000 structure fires attributed to arson. Arson fires kill over 300 people each year. For the ninth straight year, juvenile fire-setters accounted for half or more (50.8%) of those arrested for the crime. Though the percentage of children fire-setters under 10 is by far the lowest (3.2% in 2003) since at least 1980, that percentage is still much higher than for any other crime the FBI tracks.

“Those statistics are frightening – and sobering. National Arson Awareness Week, which is the first full week of May, should make all of us more responsive to our local fire and law enforcement department’s call for community support in the war against arson,” says **John Reich, Deputy Director of the South Carolina Division of Fire and Life Safety.**

Statistics also show that the rates of intentional structure fires or arson offenses, relative to population, are highest in large cities but are also higher in rural communities than in small towns.

The US Fire Administration reports that arson and other uncontrolled wildland fires pose a serious threat to lives, property, and natural resources in our rural and suburban communities and suggest the following preventive measures:

- Clearing trees and brush, and fuel tanks away from structures;
- Landscaping efforts designed to provide a defensible space around structures;
- Maintaining adequate outside water sources and a means of powering water pumping or delivery equipment;
- Maintaining adequate ingress and egress routes to facilitate firefighting efforts; and
- Using fire-resistant noncombustible building materials in construction.

The South Carolina Division of Fire and Life Safety join with the National Association of State Fire Marshals and the International Association of Arson Investigators to identify steps that can be taken to reduce the incidents of arson:

- If you know or suspect that an arson crime has been committed, contact your local fire or police department, or the toll-free **Arson Hotline at 1-800-922-7766.**
- If you suspect a child is setting fires, notify the proper authorities, it may not be “just a phase” they are going through. Keep matches and lighters out of reach and out of sight of young children. Fire, police, school guidance counselors, or mental health representatives may provide assistance in these instances.

- Report suspicious activity near houses or other buildings to the local police and support Neighborhood Watch programs.
- Keep leaves, firewood, overgrown brush and shrubbery and other combustibles away from buildings. Most arson fires are started outdoors. Don't make it easy for an arsonist to start a fire or easy for an outdoor fire to spread to a building.
- Keep doors and windows locked when a building is unoccupied.
- Monitor any suspicious persons and vehicles.
- Support the adoption of local wildland-urban interface building codes and weed abatement ordinances for structures built near wooded areas.
- Install residential fire sprinklers in your home.

Arson wears many faces. Arson is a troubled kid with a lighter . . . a hate monger with an ax to grind . . . a gang member seeking to prove his toughness . . . an urban disease that eats away at the core of our cities . . . and pestilence that further blights poor rural communities. The most effective way of combating arson, of course, is simply to prevent it from happening. Lets work together to stop Arson and prevent fires.