

Safety Theme:

2009 Arson Awareness Week: May 3 – 9, 2009

This year's theme for Arson Awareness Week is, "Arson for Profit," and is intended to draw attention to the increasing number of maliciously and deliberately set fires for economic gain. Arson for profit is when businesses or individuals set fires to reduce financial loss, recoup initial investments, or dispose of depreciated assets, usually for a payout from insurance companies. "Arson for profit is a criminal offense and can send an arsonist to jail for years," states John Reich, South Carolina State Fire Marshal.

The United States Fire Administration's National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) states the two leading causes of civilian deaths in the United States are arson, at 28 percent, and smoking, at 18 percent, and further states that arson is by far, the leading cause of property loss, at 26 percent. Fire departments in South Carolina participate in this system, reporting fire and emergency response incidents through the South Carolina Fire Incident Reporting System (SCFIRS). However, in South Carolina, cooking related incidents is the leading cause of fire deaths.

"Those statistics are frightening – and sobering. National Arson Awareness Week 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. 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 . . . or someone looking for monetary gain at someone else's expense. Whatever the motivation, the most effective way of combating arson, of course, is simply to prevent it from happening," Mr. Reich adds.

Steps that can be taken to reduce the incidents of arson in communities:

- If you know or suspect that an arson crime has been committed, contact your local fire or police department, or call the **South Carolina Arson Hotline (1-800-92-ARSON)**.
- If you suspect a child is setting fires, notify the proper authorities. Juvenile firesetting is a growing problem and 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.
- Keep dumpsters at least 10 feet away from buildings and roof overhangs. Make sure all discarded materials are placed inside the containers and padlock them after hours.
- Illuminate the exterior entrances with sufficient lighting.
- Secure and monitor unoccupied and abandoned buildings.