



OP-ED FOR CONSIDERATION

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Arson is a Community Problem; Awareness is Key and Everyone Can Help

by Bruce Trego, Pennsylvania State Fire Commissioner

Each year for Arson Awareness Week (AAW), the U.S. Fire Administration gathers and shares information to raise awareness of arson while providing communities with strategies to combat these problems. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, about 23,800 vacant residential building fires are reported each year and cause an estimated 75 deaths, 200 injuries, and as much as \$785 million in property loss. Unfortunately, we have come to understand that for many of these incidents involving vacant buildings, the fires were set intentionally.

This year's AAW theme is "Preventing Arson at Construction Sites."

Here are some tips that could help keep your community safe from arson:

- **Community Members:**
 - Awareness is essential to preventing instances of arson. Become more familiar with the day-to-day activities occurring in your neighborhood and report odd or suspicious behavior to authorities.

- **First Responders/Inspectors:**
 - If there has been negative press about the project, remind workers to be vigilant on the job site.
 - Make unannounced inspections to assess the project, activities and the job site.
 - Perform site planning and preplanning throughout the building process.
 - Invite surrounding fire departments/companies to assist in the pre-fire plan.
 - Take photos of anything you believe is a potential hazard and inform the job site manager.

- **Contractors and Tradespeople:**
 - Store solvents, fuels and tools in a locked storage container or remove them from the job site when you are not using them.
 - Request additional patrols or drive-bys from your local law enforcement.
 - Remove trash and debris from the job site.
 - Try not to store excess materials on the job site.
 - Secure doors and windows on structures when crews are not actively working on the property.

Arson is not a victimless crime. Aside from the financial implications for property owners and the insurance industry, vacant and abandoned building fires cause a disproportionate share of firefighter injuries according to the National Fire Prevention Association.

Perhaps most importantly, everyone should treat this as an opportunity to discuss fire safety with their families. The two most important things we can do to prevent fire-related deaths are to ensure the presence of operational smoke alarms in our homes, and to have an evacuation plan that the entire family has practiced.

Smoke alarms can decrease the risk of dying in a home fire by as much as half. From the moment an alarm sounds, occupants may have as little as two minutes to safely exit the building.

For more information about the fire service in Pennsylvania, go to www.osfc.pa.gov, "like" the OSFC page at www.facebook.com/PAOSFC or call 1-800-670-3473.

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