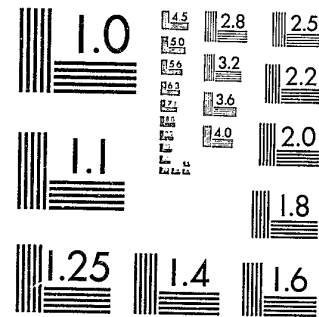


National Criminal Justice Reference Service



This microfiche was produced from documents received for inclusion in the NCJRS data base. Since NCJRS cannot exercise control over the physical condition of the documents submitted, the individual frame quality will vary. The resolution chart on this frame may be used to evaluate the document quality.



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS-1963-A

Microfilming procedures used to create this fiche comply with the standards set forth in 41CFR 101-11.504.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the author(s) and do not represent the official position or policies of the U. S. Department of Justice.

National Institute of Justice
United States Department of Justice
Washington, D. C. 20531

5/6/82

81737

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the National Institute of Justice.

Permission to reproduce this copyrighted material has been granted by

Federal Emergency Management
Agency

to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Further reproduction outside of the NCJRS system requires permission of the copyright owner.



federal emergency
management agency

FOR THE RECORD

1725 I Street, N.W. / Washington, D.C. 20472

A monthly information service of the Federal Emergency Management Agency on significant subjects affecting America's civil readiness to cope with major hazards, in war or peace.

Number 3
February 1981
Editor: Russell Clanahan
(202) 634-1600

ATTACKING ARSON--THE TASK FORCE APPROACH

By Richard Strother
Associate Administrator
U.S. Fire Administration
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Arson has become the fastest growing crime in the United States and one of the most expensive.

Compare the national direct loss due to arson (estimated at ~~\$1.3~~ billion per year), for example, to losses from other major crimes such as larceny-theft (\$1.1 billion) or burglary (\$1.4 billion). Beyond this, tax losses due to arson could multiply that ~~\$1.3~~ billion. And there is a cruel cost in lives lost, or disrupted. Estimates indicate that about 700 fire deaths each year can be attributed to arson.

The first major effort at lending Federal assistance to local communities in attacking the problem of arson occurred at the Fifth Annual Conference of the United States Fire Administration (USFA) in New Orleans in January 1980. For the first time, the conference was dedicated solely to one theme--the prevention and control of arson. Those attending included fire service and law

8/737

enforcement personnel, prosecutors, city and state leaders, as well as representatives from the insurance and banking industries. They spent three days listening to a number of practical, proven solutions to the problem.

Paramount among the proven solutions was the "Arson Task Force" concept--a community joining together as a team to reduce arson.

The task force concept originated in Seattle in 1975. In 1971 Seattle's arson loss had reached an all-time high of \$621,000. However, the following year it jumped to \$1.2 million, then \$2.2 million, then \$3.2 million in 1974, and at the time the task force was formed, authorities were predicting a loss exceeding \$4 million.

"The problem was so large it was overwhelming the fire department's resources," now-retired Fire Chief Frank R. Hanson explained. "It had to become a total community project."

"Eight agencies were selected to become members of the task force team. They included the fire and police, the prosecuting attorney, the insurance industry, several executive branches of local government, and representatives of local business.

"Everyone had the ability to make on-the-spot decisions--they were all leaders," he stressed.

Given a total community commitment, the arson task force can be very effective without obligating a tremendous amount of funds. There are a number of resources available in any community which can be effectively utilized as soon as they are identified.

In Seattle, arson was no longer regarded as a crime against the insurance industry. Suddenly it was seen in its true perspective--a crime against friends and neighborhoods.

Their projected \$4 million arson loss in 1975 never materialized. The task force impact resulted in the loss decreasing to \$2.6 million. In 1976 it was down to \$1.9 million and has continued to decline every year since then, in spite of tremendous increases in replacement cost.

As Seattle's success became documented, other progressive cities began to look at the program and adopt it to fit their own needs. San Francisco Fire Chief Andy Casper, Phoenix Fire Chief Al Brunacini, and New Haven Chief John P. Reardon are three examples of fire officials using the task force concept to control arson within their own communities.

San Francisco's arson task force was introduced in October 1977, after it was estimated that nearly half of the property loss in the city was the direct result of arson. "After looking at Seattle's program we instituted a number of measures designed to educate and involve the public," Chief Casper explained.

"We installed a 24-hour-a-day arson hot line to receive any information citizens might have about arson incidents. We established an arson reward system. We used billboards--"Stamp Out Arson," and distributed thousands of brochures describing the problem and solutions, and we started an extremely active publicity program."

Again, the results were the same as Seattle's--an unexpected drop in incidents.

When Phoenix recorded a 111 percent increase in arson fires between 1976 and 1977, Battalion Chief J. J. Walker, Chief Fire Investigator of the Phoenix Fire Department, reported to Chief of Department Al Brunacini: "Current trends in arson are worsening despite all efforts that have been and are being made. Most experts agree that a task force on arson is the best method for arson prevention. The key behind the task force's success is cooperation of all members."

That cooperation became evident when Phoenix Mayor Margaret T. Hance appointed a seven-member task force and recommended an expenditure of \$91,000 and four positions and equipment to "expand the city's capability to prosecute and convict arsonists."

New Haven's arson task force became operational in July 1977, and according to Chief Reardon, "New Haven has recorded a substantial reduction and there's no question of its success."

Armed with these success stories and many others, the U.S. Fire Administration decided to increase further national awareness of the task force concept. USFA brought principal participants from 20 cities of varying size to the conference at New Orleans to receive special instruction on the formation of task forces. The participants (four per city--mayor, fire and police chiefs and prosecutors) attended extensive orientation briefings before returning to their respective cities to begin the formation of local task forces.

In May 1980, all 20 cities involved were contacted for a quarterly progress report. While the results thus far are not as

spectacular as with established programs, definite progress is being made.

Lincoln, Nebraska's Chief Fire Inspector Jerry McGinn reported: ". . . After returning from New Orleans, I immediately put the arson task force concept into effect, and it has been working very efficiently. . . You must realize we are now into the early stages of this program and I'm sure we are going to learn a lot over the next few months; but we are excited about the challenge. . ."

Robert E. Broom, City Manager of Aurora, Colorado, states: "The task force is currently in operation and is functioning in an excellent manner."

Immediately following the New Orleans conference, the task force concept became a "road show."

As part of an interagency agreement, funds were transferred to USFA from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) to provide technical assistance to states and municipalities on how to implement arson task forces. The Arson Task Force Assistance Program was born.

Starting in February 1980, the program began providing workshops for interested communities on how to establish a task force, discussing the advantages and problems experienced by other cities in implementing the concept.

There is no direct financial assistance available through the program. However, technical assistance is provided to help citizens establish task forces within their jurisdictions. If a

city decides to start a task force and runs into problems on how to proceed with specific issues--training, data collection, arson public education campaigns, etc.--USFA will send to that city personnel experienced in dealing with these program areas in their communities.

To date, presentations have been made to over 3,200 participants. This includes five conferences, 12 assistance packages to states, 10 state task force motivation meetings, five meetings in cooperation with the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and 45 city presentations.

USFA is now ready to deliver a simultaneous presentation directed at the same type of audience.

To be known as the USFA "Arson Shield," the presentation will consist of an umbrella-type package of arson prevention and control programs--a "shield" for a community to use in their fight against arson.

Along with the Arson Task Force Assistance Program, participants will receive information on the Arson Information Management System, Arson Awareness and Public Education, and Juvenile Firesetter Counseling.

The concept behind the Arson Information Management System (AIMS) is that arson, particularly arson-for-profit, is to some extent a predictable and therefore preventable crime. AIMS is a tool used to predict the building most susceptible to arson-for-profit, thereby permitting the development of specific prevention strategies.

Arson Awareness and Public Education will be a one-day seminar stressing the most effective methods of making the public aware of the problem. It stresses utilization of a media guidebook developed by the Hartford Insurance Group--a detailed step-by-step guide on conducting an arson news media program.

The final component of the Shield is the Juvenile Firesetter Counseling program. Some estimates claim that as many as 60 percent of the fires in large cities are set by children and juveniles. While that figure may be high, there is no mistaking the severity of the problem. This program is designed to assist the child under seven years of age. Briefly, it's geared to train fire education specialists, fire investigators, counselors, law enforcement and juvenile authorities, and to interview firesetting children and their families; to recognize problems that may lead to recurrent firesetting, and to identify children and families who need professional counseling.

The first Arson Shield presentation was made in September 1980 in Wisconsin. Other programs are planned or taking place at various locations throughout the nation. They are also being held in conjunction with arson detection and investigation courses offered by USFA's National Fire Academy at Emmitsburg, Maryland.

While arson remains America's fastest growing crime, federal assistance, state and local government action, and community involvement and support are beginning to have an impact in the battle against this man-made, and avoidable, disaster.

NOTE TO THE EDITOR:

There are 8 x 10" glossy prints available for the pictures below in case you choose to use this story and would like to illustrate it. For prints, contact Russell Clanahan on (202) 634-1600 or write to the address shown on the masthead.

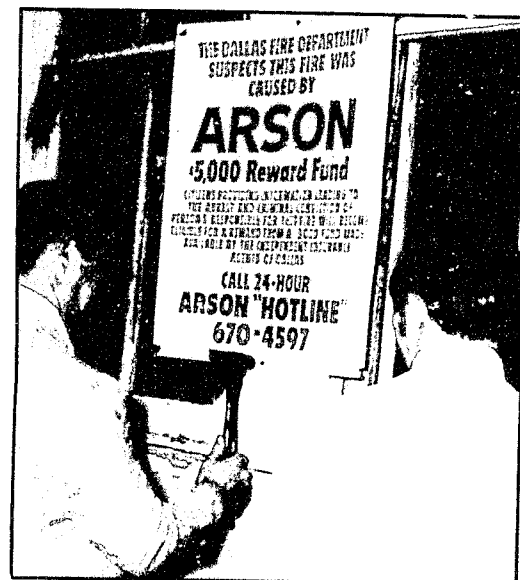


ILLUSTRATION A

Arson is a crime against friends and neighbors. So people with some knowledge of who caused a fire are invited, as in Dallas, Texas, to provide information in return for a reward so that arsonists can be apprehended, and future fires prevented. (Dallas Fire Department Photo)

END

ILLUSTRATION B

The conflagration in Chelsea, Massachusetts on October 14-15, 1973 — one of the greatest urban fires of modern American history — left 18 blocks totally consumed and 12 other blocks damaged. Arson is believed to have caused the massive, wind-driven blaze, at a total estimated cost of \$60.9 million. (Massachusetts Dept. of Public Works Photo)

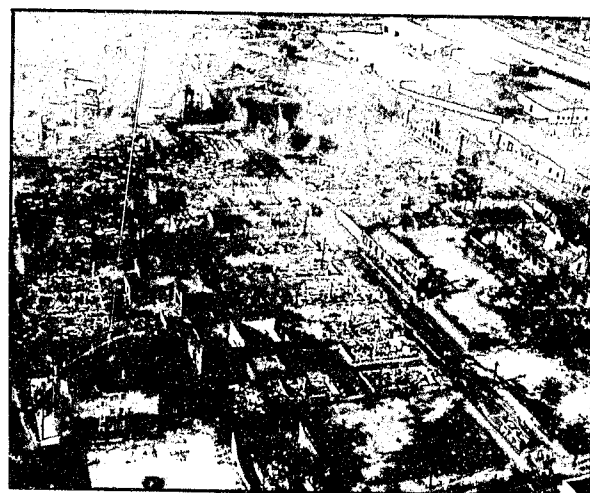


ILLUSTRATION C

A wall of fire in Chelsea, Massachusetts -- at times 100 feet wide and 80 feet high, and fanned by high winds -- caused the Chelsea fire chief to declare the first Conflagration in United States history. An army of 700 firefighters from 69 communities rallied to fight the blaze. (Photo by John Ottoson)