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## FIRE DEPARTMENT

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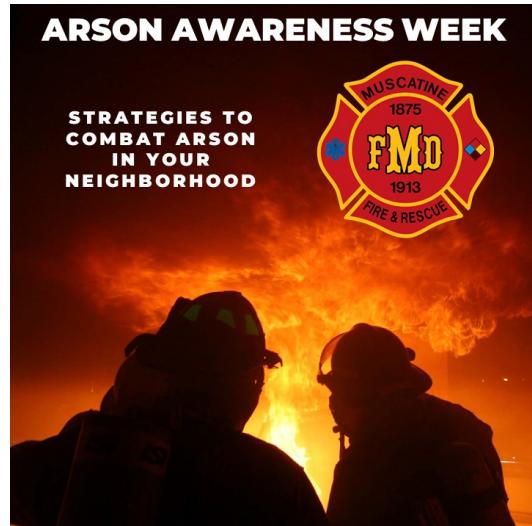
## SAFEGUARD YOUR HOME, BUSINESS AGAINST ARSON

Community Risk Reduction – Education emphasized during Arson Awareness Week

**MUSCATINE, Iowa** - The U.S. Fire Administration has designated the week of May 5-11 as Arson Awareness Week (AAW). The goal of this year's campaign is to provide residents with strategies to combat arson in their neighborhoods.

The U.S. Fire Administration's National Fire Incident Reporting System states that an estimated 16,800 intentionally set fires in residential buildings occur annually in the United States. These fires result in an estimated 280 deaths, 775 injuries and \$593 million in property loss each year.

What makes someone want to burn down a house? The motivations behind the burning of homes are curiosity, vandalism, concealing another crime, excitement, revenge and insurance fraud or arson for profit.





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### **Curiosity**

Curiosity fires are most often set by juveniles. The misuse of fire has many variables including age, motivation for firesetting behavior, type of fires set, ignition materials used to set the fire, and the child's understanding and limitations of fire. Firesetting behavior is often a symptom of the problem and may be manifested through stress and crisis in children's lives.

### **Concealing Another Crime**

Arson is sometimes used to mask or conceal another crime such as murder. The criminal sets the crime scene ablaze hoping that the victim's death will be attributed to the fire and not murder. Other crimes such as burglary and larceny are also commonly covered up by an arson fire.

### **Excitement**

Most excitement fires are nuisance fires but may escalate to homes. Excitement-motivated arsonists desire the thrill associated with setting the fire and relish the attention it brings. They rarely intend to injure people but don't have the requisite knowledge to keep the fires under control.

### **Revenge**

According to the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, the most common motive (41 percent) for a serial arsonist is revenge. An arsonist will target the home of someone in retaliation for an actual or perceived injustice against him or her.

### **Insurance Fraud/Arson for Profit**



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Arson for profit is insurance fraud, a criminal method of obtaining money from a fire loss policy. Torching homes for insurance money endanger innocent neighbors and brave firefighters. These senseless insurance crimes also raise premiums for all honest homeowners at a time when every penny counts.

#### **Be Aware of Ways to Safeguard Homes, Buildings, and Property**

Arson robs communities of its valuable assets, lives and property. It destroys more than buildings; arson can devastate a community resulting in decline through increased insurance premiums, loss of business revenue and a decrease in property values. The fire service can help communities reduce the occurrence of arson and reduce its devastating effect by making residents aware of measures to safeguard their homes, buildings and property.

#### **Protect Homes from Arson**

Arson destroys more than homes; it can devastate a neighborhood resulting in decline through increased insurance premiums and a decrease in property values. Did you know that the fatality rate for intentionally set residential fires is more than twice that of other residential building fires? **Source: [Protecting Homes Against Arson PDF](#)**

Here are some tips to keep your home safe from arson:

#### **Illuminate exterior and entrances**

- Install lights on all sides of the house.
- Place motion-activated lighting near the entrances.
- Put timers on interior lights to give the illusion the home is occupied.

#### **Clear obstructions**

- Trim or remove shrubbery that blocks the view of the house from the street.
- Trim bushes and trees during the growing season.



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### Install security and fire alarm systems

- Consider installing security and fire alarm devices that can transmit an alarm to the police or fire department when the home alarm sounds.

### Keep doors and windows locked

- Install deadbolts on all external doors.
- Install window hardware with spring-loaded bolts that inserts through the window frame into the wall frame.

### Clean house

- Remove excess vegetation and piles of leaves.
- Clean around your house and garage, removing unused and unneeded paper, trash, cleaning supplies, partial cans of paint and other materials that could become kindling and fuel a fire for an arsonist.

### Preventing Arson at Construction Sites

Everyone can help prevent arson at construction sites, but awareness is key. Did you know that buildings under construction or renovation are vulnerable to arson? Accumulation of waste, ordinary combustibles, limited access, minimal water supplies and hazardous operations increase the challenge.

Here are some tips to keep a construction site safe from arson:

### What contractors can do

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



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- Try not to store excess materials on the job site.

#### What Community members can do

- Awareness is essential. Become familiar with activities in your neighborhood and report odd or suspicious activities to your local law enforcement.

For additional information, click on [Preventing Arson at Construction Sites](#)

#### Reducing Arson at Vacant and Abandoned Buildings

Abandoned and vacant structures can be extremely treacherous to firefighters as they lack structural integrity and may contain other hazards. Did you know that there are four actions communities can take?

Citizens can help reduce the negative impact and blight associated with unsecured vacant and abandoned buildings and keep firefighters safe with these actions: Monitor, Secure, Inspect, and Mark.

#### Monitor

- Monitor all vacant properties. Properties that are secure and well-maintained, even though they are unoccupied, are not the problem. Those that have no viable owner and are unsecured and accessible to unauthorized entry require immediate attention to prevent fires and other criminal activity.



#### Secure

- Keeping unauthorized occupants out of vacant and abandoned buildings is key to preventing fires. Unsecured vacant or abandoned buildings are intrinsically more dangerous than occupied structures.
- Boarding buildings



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- While there are many ways to secure properties, this board up procedure is one of the most effective. Done correctly and coupled with a surveillance program, buildings secured using this method are very difficult to enter. Using this method also makes buildings resistant to deterioration due to weather and other elements.
- Security and surveillance
  - Where physical security is required, it must be done well to be effective. Once secured, the building must be patrolled with some frequency to make sure it remains secure. High visibility police patrols can also be effective. The effectiveness of security measures should be evaluated during building inspection.

#### Inspect

- Inspect and evaluate vacant or abandoned buildings to identify potential safety issues that first responders would face if they responded to a fire. The evaluation data can also be used in the decision-making process when limited funds must be allocated to address the most significant problems.
- The authority to inspect comes from building codes and ordinances adopted by the jurisdiction. It is important to check department policy and know what the inspector must do to legally enter a property.
- Personnel assigned to inspect vacant or abandoned buildings should use extreme caution when entering and moving throughout these structures. Potential hazards for both inspectors and first responders include the following:
  - Fall and trip hazards
  - Hazardous materials on property
  - Ongoing criminal activity
  - Standing water in basements
  - Vermin
  - Unauthorized occupants
  - Unstable structure



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- Inspectors should wear proper protective clothing and carry a radio and flashlight when operating in these buildings. It is always good practice to inform dispatch when you are entering and leaving a building so that they can account for your location should you need assistance.

#### Mark

- Mark buildings after they are secured and inspected. This provides a visual cue to firefighters responding to a fire, indicating that the property is vacant, was evaluated and found to contain hazards to firefighters.
- A common way to mark these buildings is a red square sign with a white X in it posted to the front of the building.

#### Protecting Houses of Worship Against Arson

Each year from 2020 to 2022, an estimated average of 1,300 fires in places of worship were reported to fire departments in the U.S. These fires resulted in an estimated annual average of \$74.6 million in property loss. The leading cause of fires in places of worship was cooking (33 percent), but intentional actions accounted for an additional 15 percent.

Here are some Tips in protecting houses of worship:

- Illuminate building exterior and entrances. Place motion-activated lighting near entrances. Install lights to cover all sides of the building. Put interior lights on timers.
- Install smoke alarms and a fire sprinkler system. The most effective fire loss prevention and reduction measure for both life and property is the installation and maintenance of fire sprinklers.





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- Keep windows locked. Use window hardware with spring-loaded bolts that insert through the window frame into the wall frame.
- Clear obstructions and excess vegetation. Trim or remove shrubbery that blocks the view of the building from the street. Remove excess vegetation and piles of leaves from around the outside of the building.
- Keep doors locked. Equip external doors with code-compliant hardware and secure them when the facility isn't occupied. Limit and track which members of the congregation have keys and alarm codes.
- Clean inside to remove unneeded paper, trash, cleaning supplies, paint cans and other materials that could fuel a fire for an arsonist.



#### Youth Firesetting

Children are often curious about fire. While curiosity is normal, there are things you can inform parents and caregivers about to prevent children from experimenting with fire.

Here is a message we'd like to share with parents and caregivers:

#### Teach children

- Teach children that fire is dangerous. Only adults should use matches and lighters.
- Teach children that fire is dangerous. Fire is a tool, not a toy, and must only be used by adults.
- Teach children that fire is dangerous. Even small fires can spread very quickly.

#### Make your home safer

- Make your home safer by inspecting it for fire hazards.
- Make your home safer by supervising children.



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- Make your home safer by planning and practicing your home fire escape plan.
- Make your home safer by keeping lighters and matches away from children.
- Make your home safer by having working smoke alarms on every level and inside and outside all sleeping areas.

For additional information, click [Preventing Youth Firesetting](#)

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