

PROTECTING STRUCTURES FROM ARSON

Arson is the leading cause of property loss due to fire

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Each year over 75,000 arson structure fires kill over 500 people and cost our nation \$1.3 billion in property damage

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It costs our communities so much more! One-fourth of all fires are arson and over one-half of those are set by juveniles.

~ How To Protect Your Structure ~

Illuminate Exterior Entrances

Install lights covering all sides of the building including the parking lots. Motion activated lighting, which is very inexpensive, should be placed near the entrances. Don't advertise that the building is empty. Interior lights on timers give illusion that the building is occupied.

Paint Building a Light Color

Arsonists work mostly at night. Buildings with a dark exterior provide hiding places for arsonists.

Install Burglar & Fire Alarm Systems That Transmit A Message

Alarm devices that can be wired inexpensively through the telephone circuits to transmit an alarm to the police or fire department. Check the cost of contracting with a security firm for response to alarms.

Have Your Heating & Air Conditioning Systems Checked Semi-Annually

Ensure that your electrical service is adequate for current demands.

Trim Or Remove Shrubbery & Signs That Obstruct The View Of The Building From The Street

Make sure that nothing blocks the view of the building. During the growing season, bushes and trees may need to be trimmed frequently.

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Keep Doors Locked & Bolted With Hinge-Pins On The Inside

Most buildings have too many keyed doors. Reduce the number of keyed doors and keep a record of who has a key. If you don't know who has a key to your building, change the locks. If a key is lost, change the locks. It is generally not necessary to have more than one or two doors with key locks. All other doors should be equipped with dead bolts, or in assembly areas, panic hardware that will permit exiting when doors are locked.

Keep Windows Locked, Barred, or Protected with Wire Screens

The hardware used to lock windows can sometimes be forced easily with a credit card or other tool. The best type of window hardware has spring-loaded bolts that insert through the window frame into the wall frame. If bars are used on windows in congregation areas, make certain that they can be released from the inside in the event the window is needed as an emergency escape.

Restrict Access To The Roof & Upper Floors

Nothing is gained by protecting windows and doors at ground level if trespassers have easy access to upper floors. Install fire escapes that can not be accessed at ground level. If an exterior stairway exists, close the property with a fence and a locked gate.

Consider Fencing The Property

Churches and Public Buildings generally provide an open welcoming façade, but it is not necessary that the back and sides also provide easy access. Privacy fences provides arsonists privacy, so woven fences with locked gates are a better choice.

Designate A Liaison To Establish A Relationship With The Police & Fire Services.

Initiate a fire reporting procedure. Post names and telephone numbers of contact persons on or near the door for use by the fire or police departments in the event of break-in or fire. Involve the police and fire departments and your insurance agent in your arson prevention activities. Call your local police and fire departments to request a fire prevention and security evaluation. This may result in a reduction of your insurance premiums.

Be Wary Of Strangers

Ask strangers to identify themselves-- the innocent will not mind. Register guests and remove the registry at the end of each night. Check the credentials of service personnel asking permission to enter. If in doubt, call their company to verify their identity. After many arson fires, neighbors remember that they were suspicious of a person or car, but did not know what to do or whom to call. Educate residents and neighbors regarding suspicious activity and what to do if they have concerns. Encourage them to make a record of the suspicious activity including: the date and time, a description of vehicles, license numbers, and persons; call the local police immediately.

Establish A Neighborhood Watch Program

The probability of arson increases during holidays or celebrations such as Halloween, 4th of July, New Year's Eve, as well as during periods of social unrest, and also major athletic events, there is a need for heightened awareness and surveillance. A rotating schedule of volunteer members to stand watch or provide irregularly scheduled patrols can be very effective.

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Clean House

The boiler room or heating room of many public buildings is a storehouse of unused and unneeded paper, trash, cleaning supplies, partial cans of paint, and other materials that make a bonfire of the structure when arranged by the arsonist. Store all flammables, paint, gasoline, mowers, etc., outside in a locked storage building.

Make a Media Event of Your Efforts

Arsonists seldom strike facilities that are ready for them.

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