



# HOT • ISSUES



## Arson Awareness Week

MAY 2-8, 2004

The theme for this year's Arson Awareness Week is *Juvenile Firesetting: The Preventable Arson*.\*

It is especially appropriate, then, that this edition of *Hot Issues* is devoted almost entirely to an in-depth case study of an incident of juvenile arson. Several people were involved in the case before it was brought to closure—a deputy fire marshal, a police detective, a school resource officer and a district attorney—and the story is told from their viewpoints. This study provides a unique opportunity to understand some of the reasons that juveniles choose to misuse fire.

The names of the juveniles have been changed.

\*Complete information and a media kit to help communities promote Arson Awareness Week are available from the United States Fire Administration. See page 8 for details.

## The fire department - first on the scene

By Deputy Fire Marshal Jeffery Mack, Salem Fire Dept.

Late in 2003 I was requested to respond to a fire investigation at a Salem residence. Upon my arrival I made contact with the on-scene commander and received an update of what had happened prior to my arrival. When the first-in engine company arrived, flames were coming from the front of the structure. Upon entering the structure, they saw fire in the living room area. There were several independent fires in the living room, with the largest amount of fire located in one of the corners of the room. The fire was contained to the living room.

The owner of the structure arrived and informed me that the residence was vacant at the time of the fire and in the process of being remodeled. At this time I was contacted by a neighbor who had seen a couple of juveniles at the front door to the structure prior to the fire occurring. The neighbor told me that she saw the juveniles knocking on the front window near the front door.

These red flags—three independent fires in the room of origin, a vacant structure with minimal furnishings, and the neighbor witnessing juveniles at the residence prior to the fire—indicated this fire might be incendiary in nature so I requested that a Salem police detective respond to the fire scene. Detective Skip Miller arrived and I informed him of my findings and the reason I called him to the scene prior to processing the fire scene.

### Red flags point to arson

We began processing the fire scene and determined the point of origin to be in the living room and the



fire to be incendiary in nature. While we were processing the fire scene, information was received in regard to a couple possible persons of interest. Detective Miller had an officer

follow up on this information. As we were finishing the fire scene, Detective Miller informed me that two juvenile persons of interest were in custody and en route to the police department for questioning.

About the author: Jefferey Mack is a long-time member of the local juvenile firesetter intervention network, with extensive experience working with juveniles misusing fires.

## Police detective arrives

by Detective Skip Miller, Salem Police Dept.

**This report contains information on three separate incidents, all of which were committed by the same suspects.**

I was requested to respond to a residential fire in order to assist Deputy Fire Marshal Mack in an origin and cause investigation, as the fire was determined to be suspicious in nature.

I contacted the owners of the property and learned they had purchased the residence for \$145,000 after it had been foreclosed on, and since then they had spent at least \$30,000 for materials for remodeling.

The owner had last been to the residence on the night before the fire to work on a wall in the utility room. Prior to leaving the residence for the night, he stated he had turned off all the lights in the residence and that there were no space heaters or other such items present in the home. The furnace, which was installed four to six weeks before, had been set at 50 degrees. The owner stated he had secured the residence prior to leaving for the night.

**Witness provides important information** The owners consented to allow me to search the residence for the origin

and cause of the fire. At that time I came in contact with the owner of a neighboring property. She said earlier that day she had seen two white male boys, approximately sixteen years of age, wearing jeans and blue sweatshirts. She described the boys as being about 5'6" in height and stocky with brown or black hair. The witness stated she had never seen the boys in the neighborhood before and watched as they walked toward the front door of the house. She found this curious as she knew the home to be currently vacant during the remodeling. The witness watched as the two boys "pounded" on what appeared to be a window located immediately to the right of the front door. She drove by the house for a second look; however, when she did so, the two boys were gone.

**School resource officer gets a tip** While investigating the origin and cause for the house fire with Fire Marshal Jefferey Mack, I was contacted by Officer Kris

Knox, who is a school resource officer for one of the local high schools. Officer Knox informed me she had received information indicating that two students (Eastman and Black) had recently started a fire at "John Brown's" old house. Further research indicated the house that had burned was the former residence of John Brown. The physical descriptions of the suspected students provided by Officer Knox matched the descriptions provided by the witness. They also matched suspect information received by Salem Dispatch regarding a prowler call for two juveniles near the burned residence.

After locating the suspects, both agreed to be transported to the Salem Police Department to be interviewed. Prior to speaking with either suspect, I contacted Detective Shryer and asked if he would read Suspect Eastman his rights and begin interviewing him, while I did the same with Suspect Black.

**The first bad decision is made** When asked to relay the events of the day leading up to our contact, Black told me that he arrived at school at approximately 0710 hours, where he met up with "Jimmy" (referring to Eastman). Black stated the two decided to "cut school" and go see another friend of theirs. This friend was not at home so they continued on to another friend's house. Black added that while the two were walking, some lady had yelled something at them. At his point they continued up the hill to "John Brown's" former house.

**Just "hanging out"** When asked to describe what happened at John Brown's former residence, Black explained he and "Jimmy" first went to the front door where they "pounded" on a door to see if anyone was there. After being assured no one was at the residence, they walked toward the back of the residence where he broke a window on the back door, which allowed him to reach in through the window to try and unlock the door. Black stated that due to the type of locking mechanism on the door they were unable to gain entry, so "Jimmy" broke a window that was located next to the door. Black stated after the window was broken and then slid open, both he and "Jimmy" entered the house where they "hung out for a while."

**Vandalism escalates** When asked what the two had done inside the residence, Black admitted to breaking multiple other windows (along with Eastman) located on the back side of the house, as well as a sliding door. At some point, the two started talking about burning the house down. Black went on to tell me that after

finding some newspapers in the residence, “Jimmy crumpled up the paper and put it near a couch.” Black added they then located some matches, and both the suspects lit the paper on fire prior to leaving through a sliding rear door they had previously broken out.

After leaving the house the two continued on to a neighboring house. At this location, Black stated he found a brick in the yard, which he picked up and threw through a window. When asked why he had done this, Black shrugged and stated they were going to go to the front door and knock first, but then decided not to. When asked if Black had planned on entering the residence, he stated that they had not. However, after further questioning, Black admitted they were going to “break in.”

When asked if Black and/or Eastman had been involved in any other illegal activity that day, he stated they had not. However, when I recontacted Black (after questioning Eastman), he admitted the two had burglarized a third residence near the high school, where Eastman stole a snowboard, snow boots, \$10 in cash and a knife. When asked where the knife and cash were located, Black gave me the \$10, which he stated came from the residence (two five dollar bills), adding that the knife was in Eastman’s bedroom.

**Eastman is interviewed next** I next contacted Eastman, who had previously been read his rights by Detective Shryer.

Detective Shryer informed me Eastman had denied being involved in any burglary or arson. I told Eastman I had spoken with Detective Shryer and knew he had lied to him. I then asked if Eastman was going to tell me what happened. In essence, Eastman told me the following:

On the morning in question, his dad had dropped him off at school where he met up with Bryan (referring to Bryan Black) the two decided they would “go around and find places to break in and steal stuff.” Eastman added that he is “a clepto” and “I get my jollies off of stealing things.”

Eastman corroborated the narrative given by Black, stating they were looking for a place to break into and that while they were behind a house, “a lady came out and yelled at us.” Eastman added that when the lady yelled at them, he turned around so she could not see his face; however, Black turned to face her as if to ask what she wanted. Eastman stated shortly thereafter the two took off running and ended up going to “John Brown’s old house.”

Eastman stated that while en route to “John Brown’s house,” they located numerous houses that were

“nice,” but had Sonitrol alarms. Eastman stated, “I don’t do Sonitrol alarms.”

When asked what happened when both Eastman and Black arrived at John Brown’s old house, he stated they tried to break a window located in a back door, as well as a rear sliding door, which he stated they hit with a shovel, but it would not break. After being unable to gain entry through the rear door, or rear sliding door, Eastman stated he broke a rear side window located next to the door, where he was then able to crawl in and open a sliding door (that the two had previously tried to break).

When asked how long the two had been in the residence, he stated somewhere between fifteen and thirty minutes. Eastman also told me that prior to leaving the house, he found newspapers, which he separated and crumpled, placing them near the couch which was positioned next to the fireplace. Eastman explained he had separated the newspaper, as he had realized from previous incidents that newspaper stacked thickly together does not burn well. Eastman added that after placing the newspaper near the couch, he lit the paper on fire. When asked where he had found the matches, Eastman told me they were on a shelf in the house.

**Eastman had “always liked fire”** According to Eastman, Black had not participated in lighting the newspapers on fire, saying, “I’m not letting him go down for this.” When asked why they had started the fire, Eastman replied he had always liked fire, adding when he was younger he had to take a fire starting/prevention course, quickly stating the course had no effect on him, as he had seen “worse things” than burn victims.

**Salem Fire Department said showing pictures of burn victims has never been part of their program. Did Eastman have prior involvement with fire in another city? The answer is unknown.**

When asked what they did after they left the residence Eastman told me both he and Black had walked to another residence where he picked up a brick and

threw it through a window. When asked why he had done this, he stated they were going to break into the house, adding that while he threw the brick, Black held the screen open, (so the brick would crash into the window allowing him access into the residence and not simply hit the screen). When asked why they did not enter this residence, he stated, “it was too loud so we took off.”

When asked if the two had been involved in other incidents on this date, Eastman stated the two had entered another residence located near the high school. When asked what had happened at this location, Eastman told me he had thrown a hammer through a window which allowed them to gain entry. When asked what items they had taken, Eastman stated he had not seen Black take anything, but that he himself had stolen a nice snowboard with “really good bindings,” and a pair of snowboarding boots. When asked where these items were located, he stated they had been left at his house in his bedroom.

Both suspects were transported to juvenile detention hall. The juvenile authorities were notified of the incidents, as well as both parents of the suspects.

Both suspects were charged with Arson I, two counts of Burglary I, and Attempted Burglary I.

About the author: Detective Miller is cross-trained in fire investigation, a skill which proved especially useful in this case.

## School resource officer - a piece of the puzzle

by Officer Kris Knox, School Resource Officer, Salem Police Dept.

As officers we usually encounter an individual on the street one time and have to use our best judgement and whatever bits of information we can find to help us “read” that person. With that little information, we try to determine the answers we need, take the appropriate action and keep ourselves safe.

### Ongoing contact with students is an advantage

As a school resource officer I have the advantage of having near daily contact with the students in the school I’m assigned to. I have the

opportunity to become familiar with the students, learn who they hang out with, what they like to do whether it’s skateboarding, drama club, music, sports or smoking marijuana.

Being around the students on a regular basis also gives the students the opportunity to get to know me. For some of the students the only contact they’ve had with the police has been negative. Some of these kids have watched their parents getting arrested or they’ve been taken from their homes and driven to foster care by police officers. Being in the school every day gives the students a chance to see me as a person and breaks down some of the barriers allowing them to feel more comfortable talking to me.

Both of these scenarios played a part in identifying the suspects and resolving an Arson I and Burglary I investigation in 2003. That day at about 1100 hours I

received a call from the sergeant of our property crime detectives unit telling me about a suspicious fire being investigated near the high school I’m assigned to. He told me two teenage males were seen in the vicinity of the fire about the time it started. He asked if it was possible to determine which students were not in attendance at school during that time. I told him I would talk to the campus security monitors and relay the information to them in case they heard anything from other students.

Before I even left my office to talk to the campus monitors, one of them came to me and asked if I knew anything about a fire at a former student’s house. I ran the former student’s name through the school records and discovered his address was the address of the fire the Sergeant called me about.

### Student provides a tip

The campus monitor told me a student came to her asking if she

knew if it was true about there having been a fire at the former student’s house. The student went on to tell the campus monitor if there really was a fire she may know who was involved in setting it.

At that point the campus monitor brought the student into my office and she explained to me how she found out about the fire. She told me she got onto a city bus to come to school and at one of the stops she noticed two other students running to get onto the bus. She told me she thought they were acting strangely and as if they were in a hurry. She told me she struck up a conversation with them and asked them what they had been doing. She told me the two boys told her they just started a fire at the former student’s house, referring to him by name.

The reporting student told me the names of the two boys she saw on the bus and described both of them to me. I contacted the detectives who were still at the scene of the fire and shared the information with them. I gave them the addresses of the two boys and descriptions. The descriptions matched those given by a witness who observed the boys just about the time the fire started. The detectives went to the boys’ addresses, located them and took them into custody.

Ultimately, the boys admitted to starting the fire and to committing several other residential burglaries. They were remanded to adult court and sentenced for their crimes.

### Involved parent and accountability crucial

Having the benefit of contact with the students proved to be instrumental in this case.

The student who reported the information about the boys to the campus monitor is a student I dealt with last school year. She got into

some trouble at school and I referred her to the juvenile court. Her father came to the school and spoke to me at length and asked about ways he could help support his daughter and help her to turn her life around. We had a long discussion at that time about her ability to choose to make good decisions or bad decisions and what the consequences would be. I assured her, while I had referred her to the juvenile court and been involved with the discipline she received from the school, my door was open and she could come to me any time she chose to.

Even though my initial contact with that student had been under negative circumstances, it helped begin building a rapport that allowed her to feel comfortable enough to report critical information to me later on.

**Citizen's Commendation presented** After this investigation was closed the student who reported the information about the suspects was presented with a Citizen's Commendation. This certificate was signed by the chief of police and the city manager. The principal, campus monitors, assistant principals and I presented her with the award in appreciation for her crucial part in solving this case.

In addition to having had prior contact with the student reporting the suspect information, I realized I had also had contact with one of the suspects. One year ago I investigated a series of burglaries to the high school. One of the suspects in this arson case and his brother had been involved in those burglaries.

Within the first three months of the school year last year I met both of the brothers as a result of several different investigations. Those incidents ranged from skipping school to burglary.

**Importance of family** Initially the father of the two boys seemed very conscientious and concerned about his sons being held accountable. As time went on I found the father did not follow through on things we talked about regarding his sons. He became defensive and made excuses for their behavior.

This case was an excellent example of how beneficial it can be for officers to be in schools, developing relationships with students and keeping in touch with what's going on. I think it also demonstrates how differently a situation can turn out when parents are involved with and supportive of their children but continue to hold them accountable for their behavior and teach them by example.

About the author: Officer Kris Knox is a school resource officer with the Salem, Oregon, police department. She has been with the department since 1989 and an officer since 1993.

## Legal ramifications of the arson

by John Fisher, District Attorney, Polk County

**Youths had no prior record** This case involved two young men, ages sixteen and seventeen, with no prior juvenile record. The two boys cut school one morning. They apparently had no goal in mind. They ended up at the house of a former acquaintance which was vacant and in the process of being remodeled.

The two boys broke into the vacant home and engaged in some minor vandalism. They then decided to set fire to the couch in the living room. The couch caught the rest of the house on fire, resulting in more than \$100,000 in damage to the home.

After leaving this home, they attempted to break into two other homes. They were successful at the last house and they stole some things there.

Later that day they made a passing remark to a friend about what they'd been up to, and that friend reported the matter to their school and the police were notified. Both young men confessed to the crimes they had committed.

They were charged as adults with Arson in the First Degree, Burglary in the First Degree and Attempted Burglary in the First Degree. The arson was charged as a Measure 11 crime. If convicted, they would each have received a mandatory sentence of ninety months in prison, with no possibility of parole or early release. They each pled guilty to Arson in the First Degree as a non-Measure 11 crime and to one count of Burglary in the First Degree.

**Serious consequences result from the arson** The older boy was sentenced to serve forty-eight months in prison. The younger boy was sentenced to serve forty months in prison. The facts suggested that the older youth was both more culpable and more troubled than the younger one.

**An opportunity for change** If the young men behave, it is likely that they will serve their time in a juvenile facility, rather than in adult prison. If they don't, they will be eligible for transfer to the adult prison system on their eighteenth birthdays. They will also be able to participate in programs in the juvenile system that could reduce the amount of time they actually serve.

About the author: John Fisher is the district attorney for Polk County, Oregon.

## How does your state compare?

The crime of arson has the highest rate of juvenile involvement of all other crimes.

Below are the 2002 arson arrest stats from the FBI.

State	No. of arsons All/Juv/Adult	Juv % of all
Alabama	128/21/107	19%
Alaska	29/10/19	52%
Arizona	430/171/259	66%
Arkansas	66/8/58	13.7%
California	2966/1105/1861	59%
Colorado	516/195/321	60.7%
Connecticut	217/78/139	56%
Delaware	75/28/47	59.5%
DC	0/0/0	
Florida	817/245/572	42.8%
Georgia	328/66/262	25%
Hawaii	34/10/24	41.6%
Idaho	190/82/108	75.9%
Illinois	248/67/181	37%
Indiana	235/78/157	49.6%
Iowa	255/103/152	67.7%
Kansas	118/46/72	63.8%
Kentucky	75/22/53	41.5%
Louisiana	319/97/222	43.6%
Maine	105/37/68	54.5%
Maryland	496/185/311	59.4%
Massachusetts	149/41/108	37.9%
Michigan	564/131/433	30.2%
Minnesota	266/106/160	66.2%
Mississippi	257/30/237	12.6%
Missouri	745/213/532	40%
Montana	44/18/26	69%
Nebraska	201/82/119	68.9%
Nevada	94/34/60	56.6%
New Hampshire	67/26/41	63.4%
New Jersey	707/268/439	61%
New Mexico	52/12/40	29%
New York	626/222/404	54.9%
N Carolina	600/175/425	41%
N Dakota	36/13/23	56.5%
Ohio	586/200/386	51.8%
Oklahoma	337/101/236	42.7%
Oregon	388/162/226	71.6%
Pennsylvania	1137/350/787	44%
Rhode Island	195/86/109	78.8%
S Carolina	188/54/134	40%
Tennessee	327/50/277	18%
Texas	1195/348/847	41%
Utah	259/102/157	64.9%
Vermont	23/4/19	21%
Virginia	564/197/367	53.6%
Washington	566/205/361	56.7%
W Virginia	52/10/42	23.8%
Wisconsin	491/167/324	51.5%
Wyoming	71/11/60	18%

## Some characteristics of juvenile-set arson fires

The case study presented in this edition of *Hot Issues* demonstrates many of the classic characteristics of fires set by juveniles who may require intensive intervention from several agencies in the community:

- multiple points of origin
- fire set away from the home
- set in groups of two or more
- juveniles with unsupervised time
- vandalism and other criminal behavior
- readily available combustible materials
- prior firesetting behavior
- fascination with fire
- bragged about the fire to friends

## IAAI seeks case studies

The juvenile firesetter subcommittee of the IAAI is requesting examples of case studies involving juvenile-set fires from every IAAI chapter. The committee is compiling examples to be included in a national training curriculum. We would like examples of youth-set fires by youths ranging in age from four to seventeen. While high-profile cases are desired, it is not necessary. In fact, the committee would like examples of typical juvenile cases that had positive intervention or treatment results. We would also like case studies that may involve special needs youth or parent/caregivers. The case study needs to be one or two pages in length and follow the guidelines below. Include your name, department, state, IAAI chapter, telephone number and e-mail address. Send your case study to Editor, *Hot Issues*, 2760 Portland Rd NE., Salem, OR 97305 or e-mail to [Chaffin@ci.oswego.or.us](mailto:Chaffin@ci.oswego.or.us).

Case summary: Please use only a first name

Facts of the case:

- Where is the origin of the fire?
- What was the ignition source?
- What was set on fire?
- Who was involved?
- Dollar loss
- Any injuries
- Photo and/or newspaper clippings
- Was the youth cited with a fire offense?
- If the youth was not cited, what method of accountability was used?
- History of prior firesetting behavior and/or pattern of firesetting behavior
- Any other agency involvement
- Any aspect that was unusual about the case
- Outcome

Please submit by June 10, 2004.



# Dear Novelty Lighter Company,

“...Please quit making Novelty Lighters because my little brother is a toddler and if he got one he would get burned, if he does I will get sad.”

“...Stop making lighters that look like clowns, trumpets, telephones. Those lighters are dangerous because little kids are playing with them.”

“...Third the hospital is a bad place to end up last time I was there was a friend of mine who had burnt her hair and my cousin Jack he burnt his hand with a novelty lighter that looks like a garfield cat.”

Ed. note: *Hot Issues* recently received a letter from Assistant Chief Doug Bonstrom of Airway Heights Fire Department in Washington state, sharing a great idea for a school fire safety lesson.

Bonstrom writes that in his role as public educator, he visited Reardan Elementary School and “after presenting the lesson on matches and lighters and showing some novelty lighters, we asked the fourth graders to write letters to either their parents or the novelty lighter manufacturers asking them not to buy or manufacture (these) lighters. Two letters from each of the classes along with a short article were published in the local paper. This year the letters were photocopied and placed in books to be delivered to the local merchants who sell novelty lighters, with a request they discontinue selling the lighters. In Airway Heights some of the letters will appear in the city newsletter that is part of the water bill mailing.”

The program has expanded to grades three and five.

We are including excerpts from some of the letters Bonstrom sent us. It was difficult to choose only a few!

“...We are very upset with this. We also saw picture of houses that were burned down because of kids thinking the novelty lighters were toys. We would be delighted to hear that you stopped making these novelty lighters.”

“...Just think if some one in your family died or got injured because of novelty lighters. Would you want to make them any more? I wouldn't!”

“...I'm only 8 but I'm smart and I know a lot about novelty lighters. Could you please stop selling novelty lighters, and here are some reasons why. You should stop selling novelty lighters because families are homeless because of them. Another reason is some kids think they are toys instead of lighters. I hope you consider this very, very, very, very important because I do. Think about it.”



Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal  
Department of State Police  
Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program  
4760 Portland Road NE  
Salem, OR 97305-1760



## Arson Awareness Week

May 2-8, 2004

The theme for this year's Arson Awareness Week is *Juvenile Firesetting: The Preventable Arson*.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) and the International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI) sponsor Arson Awareness Week. The week brings national recognition, awareness and understanding of the arson problem in the United States.

The crime of arson has the highest rate of juvenile involvement of all other crimes. Fifty-five percent of all arson arrests in the U.S. are children under eighteen. Nearly half of these are age fifteen or less and more than 5 percent are under age ten.

Juvenile arson and youth-set fires result in over 300 deaths and 2,000 injuries, \$300 million in property damage, and more than 40,000 incidents annually.

Communities are encouraged to get involved in the dissemination of arson awareness information by creating a simple, identifiable and unifying message. More information is available through Arson Awareness Week, including media kit, fact sheet and a regional list of youth-set fires. It is available on the USFA Web site: <<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/fire-service/arson/arson-aaw1.shtm>>

Point of Contact: Timothy Patrick O'Dowd at 301.447.1091 or [Tim.ODowd@dhs.gov](mailto:Tim.ODowd@dhs.gov)

## Call for stories

*Hot Issues* is looking for stories about Arson Awareness Week activities. Send us a paragraph or two about your interesting ideas, how you implemented them, the people affected and photos if you have them. We would like to report on it in the summer edition. Please submit by June 15, 2004, to Editor, *Hot Issues*, Office of State Fire Marshal, 4760 Portland Rd. NE, Salem, OR 97305-1760 or via e-mail at <[Carol.Baumann@state.or.us](mailto:Carol.Baumann@state.or.us)>.

A special thank you  
to  
**International Association  
of Arson Investigators (IAAI)  
and  
United States Fire Administration/  
FEMA/DHS**

for sponsoring this issue of *Hot Issues*.  
*The opinions expressed in this publication  
do not necessarily represent those of  
USFA/FEMA/DHS and IAAI.*

*Hot Issues* is a quarterly newsletter of information and ideas for those concerned about juvenile firesetting. It is published by the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal. Please submit news, announcements, articles, suggestions or resources for review to *Hot Issues*. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this publication is available in alternate formats by calling 503.373.1540, ext. 240. Subscriptions are free of charge.

Interim State Fire Marshal: Nancy Orr

Program Coordinator: Judith S. Okulitch

Editor: Carol Baumann