

Maryland promotes arson awareness

Gov. Martin O'Malley along with the Office of the State Fire Marshal and the U.S. Fire Administration have teamed up this year to promote arson awareness around Maryland.

This week has been designated as National Arson Awareness Week to raise consciousness of this most costly of all fires and illustrate the steps that are being taken to combat it. This year's theme is Reducing Residential Arson. The motivations behind the burning of homes are curiosity, vandalism, concealing another crime, excitement, revenge and insurance fraud.

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

Vandalism or the criminal offense of malicious mischief can be the result of boredom, peer pressure or even gang activity. Vandalism is most common at abandoned or vacant homes.

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. Other crimes such as burglary and larceny are also commonly covered up by an arson fire.

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.

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.

Arson for profit is insurance fraud, a criminal method of obtaining money from a fire loss policy. The losses for arson are staggering.

Dennis Jay, the executive director for the **Coalition Against Insurance Fraud**, said, "Arson schemes are dangerous and damaging. Torching homes for insurance money endangers innocent neighbors and brave firefighters."

"Marylanders need to be proactive in the communities they reside. Members in the neighborhood should actively communicate with each other and local authorities to help deter these heinous crimes," State Fire Marshal William Barnard said.

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**Coalition Against
Insurance Fraud**