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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Arson Awareness Week
May 1 – 7, 2011
“Community Arson Prevention”

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Charleston, WV – The West Virginia State Fire Marshal's Office announces this year's Arson Awareness Week theme: “Community Arson Prevention”.

The following information is provided by the United States Fire Administration (USFA).

The goal for this year's Arson Awareness Week, which takes place May 1 – 7, 2011, is to focus attention on the horrific crime of arson and provide communities with tools and strategies to combat arson in their neighborhoods, businesses, schools, and places of worship.

According to the USFA's (NFIRS) data and the National Fire estimated average of 316,600 departments in the United States firefighters and civilians. In 2006, In addition to needless injury and death, an estimated \$1.1 billion in direct property loss occurs annually.



National Fire Incident Reporting System Protection Association (NFPA), an intentional fires are reported to fire each year causing injuries to 7,825 ten firefighters died as a result of arson.

Here in West Virginia, over 3,400 arson fires were reported by fire departments from 2005-2009, with almost \$36 million dollars' estimated property and contents loss.

Arson robs communities of its valuable assets – lives and property. Arson destroys more than buildings: it can devastate a community resulting in the decline of the neighborhood through increased insurance premiums, loss of business revenue, and a decrease in property values.

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Communities can develop a Neighborhood Watch Program, partnering with their local fire department, law enforcement, insurance providers, business leaders, churches, and local community groups. Neighborhoods can reduce the likelihood of arson occurring by promoting neighborhood watches and educate people about recognizing and reporting unusual activities along with implementing improved internal and external security for homes and businesses.

Some tips for arson prevention projects in your neighborhood:

- Clean up the neighborhood by removing all garbage and excess vegetation that is capable of being ignited.
- Remove all possible sources of ignition such as flammable liquids and unused gasoline containers.
- Remove abandoned vehicles. On average, there are over 25,000 estimated arson fires each year involving vehicles. Most car fires are started to cover up other criminal activity, or simply as an act of vandalism. Abandoned cars are targets for arson.
- Secure abandoned and vacant homes—which are potential arson targets. This might mean installing additional locks or boarding up broken windows or other openings with plywood.
- Communicate with the owners of a vacant home that authorities are concerned—and why.
- Encourage your local fire department to conduct frequent fire code inspections.
- Contact public works to disconnect all utilities at the street. This includes gas, water, and electric. If there are liquified petroleum tanks, they should be disconnected and removed.
- Encourage Neighborhood Watch members to patrol these areas and write down descriptions, license plates of suspicious vehicles, and potential suspect descriptions.

The United States Fire Administration recommends everyone should have a comprehensive fire protection plan that includes smoke alarms, residential sprinklers, and practicing a home fire escape plan.

For more information, including a media kit for the **2011 Arson Awareness Week** campaign, go to <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/aaw/>.