



NEWS from STATE FIRE



NEW YORK STATE
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Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor

Floyd A. Madison, State Fire Administrator

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ARSON AWARENESS WEEK IN NEW YORK STATE

State Fire Administrator Urges New Yorkers to Get Involved to Fight this Crime

State Fire Administrator Floyd A. Madison today called on New Yorkers to be aware of the growing problem of arson in the Empire State and urged them to get involved in community efforts to combat this crime that threatens their safety and well-being.

“Prevention is the best way to protect the citizens of New York from fire,” Madison said. “Our ongoing efforts to raise citizen awareness of the arson problem and increase community involvement will go a long way toward saving lives and property.

“Communities can start a neighborhood watch program to create heightened public awareness of the arson problem and to act as a deterrent to arson crimes by working with local fire, police and code enforcement departments to recognize and report unusual activities. Arson can be reduced by having an involved and informed community working together with the fire service and law enforcement.”

The State Fire Administrator’s call to action came as Governor Andrew M. Cuomo proclaimed Sunday, May 1, through Saturday, May 7, as Arson Awareness Week in New York State. A copy of the proclamation is attached with this release.

The Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Service’s Office of Fire Prevention and Control (OFPC) is joining the efforts of the United States Fire Administration; the International Association of Arson Investigators; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; USAonWatch; the National Association of State Fire Marshals; the National Volunteer Fire Council; and the Insurance Committee for Arson control to promote this year’s Arson Awareness theme – “Working Together to Extinguish Serial Arson.”

Many communities across the country and the state are experiencing a rash of serial arson fires. Serial arson is defined as an offense committed by fire setters who set three or more fires with a significant cooling off period between the fires. These deliberate fires often result in the loss of life, untold physical and emotional suffering caused by painful injuries, and the destruction of property. Society as a whole bears the burden in higher insurance premiums, degraded communities, and diminished local government tax bases in this already uncertain economic climate.

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Several recent cases in New York State demonstrate where a collaborative effort proved beneficial in bringing each case to a successful conclusion:

- Town of Southport, Chemung County. A Southport woman was charged with arson in connection with seven fires in her neighborhood during 2009 and 2010 and was found guilty on four charges. Investigators from the Office of Fire Prevention and Control, the local police department, New York State Police and the county fire investigation team worked together to identify, apprehend and prosecute the serial fire setter. As part of the case 'Town Hall' meetings were held to keep the community informed and involved in the situation and to encourage public vigilance.
- Delaware County. A Task Force consisting of the Delaware County Office of Emergency Services, the county fire investigation team, Delaware County Sheriff's Department, New York State Police, and OFPC investigated a series of incendiary fires that occurred over a period of a few years in rural and residential neighborhoods throughout a large geographical area of the county. As a result of the investigation, individuals including volunteer firefighters were arrested and convicted in 19 of 21 cases of arson.

Investigators in the Office of Fire Prevention and Control's Arson Bureau also are working with the Office of Cyber Security – two offices within the recently formed Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services – to use geographic information systems (GIS) mapping to visually evaluate potential serial fire setting scenarios.

Madison said the goal for this year's Arson Awareness Week is to alert the fire service, law enforcement and public officials, including the community at large about the peril and havoc serial fires cause.

"Each fire tears at the very fabric of the community leaving all unsettled," Madison said. "The formation of joint Arson Task Forces brings together fire, police, prosecutors and the public sharing "Intel" and resources to more effectively combat the crime of arson."

To kick off Arson Awareness Week, OFPC and the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs are hosting the 38th annual Public Fire Safety Educators' Program at the NYS Academy of Fire Science in Montour Falls today through this Sunday. This conference brings together participants from the fire service, government agencies, private organizations and industry and provides a series of presentations, demonstrations and workshops of successful public fire prevention education programs.

For additional information on arson prevention, training or potential serial incident mapping, please contact the Office of Fire Prevention and Control at (518) 474-6746 or on the web at <http://www.dhSES.ny.gov/ofpc>

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