



Coffee Break Training - Fire Prevention and Public Education

Safeguarding Homes from Arson

No. FM-2013-1 March 28, 2013

Learning Objective: The student shall be able to identify required steps community residents can take to safeguard their homes from arson.

Arson robs communities of its valuable assets — lives and property. It destroys more than buildings: arson 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. Every year more than 25,000 intentionally set fires in homes result in an estimated 300 deaths, 700 injuries and \$500 million in direct property damage. The average dollar loss for an intentionally set fire in a residential building is \$21,320. The fatality rate for intentionally set residential fires is more than twice that of other residential building fires.

The fire service can help communities thwart the occurrence of arson and reduce its devastating effect by making residents aware of these measures to safeguard their homes.

Illuminate Exterior and Entrances

Install lights covering all sides of the house. Motion-activated lighting, which is inexpensive, should be placed near the entrances. Interior lights on timers give the illusion a residence is occupied.

Install Burglar and Fire Alarm Systems

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

Trim or Remove Shrubbery That Obstructs the View of the House from the Street

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

Keep Doors and Windows Locked and Bolted

All external doors should be equipped with dead bolts. A simple locked door could be the deterrent that saves a house from arson. The hardware used to lock windows can sometimes be easily forced open 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.

Clean House

Oftentimes, arson is a crime of opportunity. Remove excess vegetation and piles of leaves. Clean around your house and garage, removing unused and unneeded paper, trash, cleaning supplies, partial cans of paint and other materials that could become kindling and fuel a fire for an arsonist.

Equip Homes with Smoke Alarms and a Fire Sprinkler System

The combination of working smoke alarms and home fire sprinklers reduces the likelihood of death from fire by more than 82 percent. The most effective fire loss prevention and reduction measure for both life and property is the installation and maintenance of fire sprinklers.

Establish a Community Arson Watch Program

Learn about the five required steps to establish a Community Arson Watch program. (See Coffee Break No. FM-2011-0.) Form a neighborhood program, and publicize your community's efforts. Arsonists seldom strike when you are ready for them.

For more information regarding the U.S. Fire Administration's Arson Awareness Week, go to www.usfa.fema.gov/aaw.



Installing exterior lighting near home entrances and trimming shrubbery to make sure nothing blocks the view of a house can deter a potential arsonist.

For archived downloads, go to:

www.usfa.fema.gov/nfa/coffee-break/