Arson Awareness Week Is May 7 - 13

“Wildfire Arson Preparedness And Prevention”

This year’s theme: **Wildfire Arson Preparedness and Prevention**, draws attention to the need for property owners, fire service organizations and local business and government leaders to come together to prevent, mitigate and prepare for wildland arson fires to prevent further loss of lives and property. Arson is a serious and deadly crime. Every year, deliberately set fires cause millions of dollars worth of property loss resulting in hundreds of deaths. According to the National Fire Protection Association, during 2003 an estimated 37,000 structure fires attributed to arson. Arson fires kill over 300 people each year. For the ninth straight year, juvenile fire-setters accounted for half or more (50.8%) of those arrested for the crime. Though the percentage of children fire-setters under 10 is by far the lowest (3.2% in 2003) since at least 1980, that percentage is still much higher than for any other crime the FBI tracks.

Those statistics are frightening and sobering. National Arson Awareness Week, which is the first full week of May, should make all of us more responsive to our local fire and law enforcement department’s call for community support in the war against arson,” said Randy Coleman, Chairman of the Calhoun County Fire Commission.

Statistics also show that the rates of intentional structure fires or arson offenses, relative to population, are highest in large cities but are also higher in rural communities than in small towns.

The US Fire Administration reports that arson and other uncontrolled wildland fires pose a serious threat to lives, property, and natural resources in our rural and suburban communities and suggest the following preventive measures:

- Clearing trees and brush, and fuel tanks away from structures;
- Landscaping efforts designed to provide a defensible space around structures;

- Maintaining adequate outside water sources and a means of powering water pumping or delivery equipment;
- Maintaining adequate ingress and egress routes to facilitate firefighting efforts; and
- Using fire-resistant non-combustible building materials in construction.

The Fire Departments in Calhoun County join with the National Association of State Fire Marshals and the International Association of Arson Investigators to identify steps that can be taken to reduce the incidents of arson:

- If you know or suspect that an arson crime has been committed, contact your local fire or police department, or the toll-free Arson Hotline at 1-800-922-7766.
- If you suspect a child is setting fires, notify the proper authorities, it may not be just a phase they are going through. Keep matches and lighters out of reach and out of sight of young children. Fire, police, school guidance counselors, or mental health representatives may provide assistance in these instances.
- Report suspicious activity near houses or other buildings to the local police and support Neighborhood Watch programs.
- Keep leaves, firewood, overgrown brush and shrubbery and other combustibles away from buildings. Most arson fires are started outdoors. Don’t make it easy for an arsonist to start a fire or easy for an outdoor fire to spread to a building.
- Keep doors and windows locked when a building is unoccupied.
- Monitor any suspicious persons and vehicles.
- Support the adoption of local wildland-urban interface building codes and weed abatement ordinances for structures built near wooded areas.
- Install residential fire sprinklers in your home.

Arson wears many faces. Arson is a troubled kid with a
lighter . . . a hate monger with an ax to grind . . . a gang member seeking to prove his toughness . . . an urban disease that eats away at the core of our cities . . . and pestilence that further blights poor rural communities. The most effective way of combating arson, of course, is simply to prevent it from happening. Let's work together to stop arson and prevent fires.
Every year in South Carolina, millions of dollars worth of property is destroyed due to arson. About one in every four fires is intentionally set. In 2005, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division's (SLED) Arson Team received 186 arson cases and investigated over $2 million in property losses. During the first quarter of 2006, SLED's Arson Team received 57 cases of arson.

According to the Insurance Information Institute, arsonists destroyed over $850 million in insured property and killed 320 civilians nationwide in 2004. While the number of arson cases has declined, the amount of property damage and lives lost have increased since 2003.

Nationally, arson crimes are hard to solve—only 17 percent of cases ended in arrests in 2004. In South Carolina, nearly 32% of the 2005 cases have been cleared by arrest and so far in 2006 nearly 24% have been cleared by arrest.

Vandalism is the leading cause of arson. An Insurance Research Council study suggests only 14 percent of arson suspects are motivated by a desire to defraud an insurance company, but other studies find it higher. Between 20 and 25 percent of arson fires are drug-related.

Children under the age of 18 are responsible for almost half of the arson fires set in the United States.

The South Carolina Arson Hotline serves as a reporting mechanism for juvenile offenders and all arsonists in South Carolina.

The South Carolina Arson Hotline (1-800-92-ARSON) is a statewide, toll-free number, available 24 hours a day, for reporting information about suspicious fires.
$2,500 reward possible for Spartanburg fire information

Columbia - A tip to the South Carolina Arson Hotline (1-800-92-ARSON) could help solve a suspicious fire and lead to a reward of at least $2,500 for the caller.

According to Mike Julazadeh, Fire Marshal for the Spartanburg City Public Safety Department, the fire occurred at the Dollar General Store at 2720 East Main Street in Spartanburg at approximately 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 3.

The building was totally destroyed and the damage is estimated to be approximately $250,000 to $300,000. The fire also damaged Daisy a Day Florist and the Check N Go.

The on-going investigation is being conducted by the Spartanburg City Public Safety Department.

In order to qualify for the reward, the tip must be provided directly to the South Carolina Arson Hotline and lead to the arrest and conviction of the arsonist.

The South Carolina Arson Hotline (1-800-92-ARSON) is a statewide, toll-free number, available 24 hours a day, for reporting information about suspicious fires. Callers can remain anonymous.

Arson Hotline yard signs, posters, cards and bumper stickers are available FREE from the South Carolina Insurance News Service.

The South Carolina Arson Hotline has been a joint program of the South Carolina Insurance News Service and the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) since 1982.

Hotline rewards are funded by the Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of South Carolina Foundation.
Vehicle theft up for seventh year running in South Carolina

Rock Hill, Myrtle Beach have highest rates

The number of vehicles stolen in South Carolina has risen for the seventh year in a row. According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau’s (NICB) annual report on auto theft rates, Hot Spots, there were nearly 24,000 vehicles stolen in the metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) in South Carolina in 2005.

While preliminary data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) shows a 2.1 percent decrease in vehicle theft nationally, several areas around South Carolina and the adjoining metropolitan areas saw increases in vehicle theft.

The Charlotte/Rock Hill MSA had the highest vehicle theft rate in the area and ranked 25 nationally for vehicle theft. Law enforcement officials in Rock Hill attribute the increase in auto thefts to their close proximity to the interstates, North Carolina state line and the larger Charlotte metropolitan area.

While the Columbia area had the highest number of vehicle thefts within South Carolina, Myrtle Beach continues to hold the number one spot of all the South Carolina MSAs and number 27 in the country for the vehicle theft rate.

NICB and local law enforcement officials say that Myrtle Beach has a higher vehicle theft rate due to the distance to the state line as well as the high rate of tourism and popular large events in the area each year.

Vehicle theft costs car owners and insurance companies nearly $8 billion each year according to the Insurance Information Institute (III).

Auto theft is covered under the comprehensive section of an auto insurance policy. Premium rates for comprehensive insurance are affected by the likelihood that an insured car will be stolen or damaged and the car’s value at the time of the loss. The South Carolina Insurance News Service recommends car buyers consider a vehicle’s theft rate before purchasing a new car.

The vehicle theft study released last week by the NICB ranked some metropolitan areas of South Carolina out of 360 areas in the United States according to the theft rate, which is the number of vehicle thefts reported per 100,000 in population.

The NICB recommends 4 steps for protecting your vehicle:

1) Use common sense - Lock your doors, remove the keys and park in well-lit, public areas
2) Utilize visible and audible devices such as alarms or steering wheel locks
3) Use immobilizing devices like cut-off switches and fuel disablers
4) Purchase tracking devices which emit a signal to police when the vehicle is reported stolen

The Modesto, Calif. metropolitan area has a higher theft rate than any other city in the United States. Six of the top 10 areas with the highest vehicle theft rates are in California.

For the list of the most commonly stolen vehicles in South Carolina, link to the South Carolina Insurance News Service web site at www.scinsnews.com or call 803-252-3455.

Anyone with information concerning auto theft can report it anonymously by calling 1-800-TEL-NICB (1-800-835-6422). For the full NICB auto theft study, link to www.nicb.org.

For 30 years the South Carolina Insurance News Service, a nonprofit, nonlobbying organization, has been providing property and casualty insurance information to consumers in South Carolina. The South Carolina Insurance News Service is funded by insurance companies doing business in South Carolina.