



## ***Preventing Church Arson: U.S. Fire Administration guidelines to minimize risk***

**SCOPE:** This Risk Management Alert is designed to increase awareness of the problem of arson as a cause of church fires. The U.S. Fire Administration published an alert concerning this subject in November 2004.

**BACKGROUND:** Information from the U.S. Fire Administration was used in the development of this Risk Management Alert.


- Arson claimed the lives of more than 650 people and caused \$2.2 billion in property loss in a recent year.
- Two million fires are reported each year, including as many as 573,000 arson fires.
- Churches are often an easy target for arsonists since many are located in isolated areas, they are empty much of the time, and many are constructed of wood and furnished with wooden pews.

Motives to set church arson fires include: spite or revenge, fraud, vandalism, murder, concealment of a crime, and/or racial hatred.

### ***Preventing Church Arson***

- Illuminate the church exterior and entrances. Use motion-activated lighting near doors and windows. Good illumination will help deter arson and other crimes such as vandalism.
- Proper landscaping can help create a crime-free environment. Keep shrubbery and trees trimmed so the building can be observed by passing patrols or neighbors, etc.
- Use adequate locks and security devices on all doors and windows and keep the church locked when not occupied. Remember that emergency exits must remain operable from inside.
- Communicate with law enforcement and fire officials about concerns regarding arson and other crimes. Invite the fire department to tour the church and conduct pre-fire planning.
- Appoint a responsible person from the church to work as a liaison with these authorities.
- Promote a neighborhood arson and crime watch to report suspicious activity and encourage neighbors to be alert to the presence of strangers in the area of the church. Suspicious persons or activities should be reported promptly to the police.
- Keep church leaders and members informed of concerns as well as fire- and crime-prevention activities.
- Keep boxes, trash, wood, and other combustibles away from the building.
- Install a burglar and fire alarm/detection system with central station monitoring to protect all parts of the church, and have it tested and maintained according to national standards on an annual basis.

For more information on how you can help prevent fires, please contact your local fire department on a non-emergency number or the United States Fire Administration at **(800) 238-3358** or [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

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