



A Message From the Fire Chief

Another beautiful spring is here! And with spring comes National Arson Awareness Week from May 2 to May 8. This year the theme is "Community Arson Prevention."

Why is it important for citizens of Portsmouth to be aware of arson? Look at the numbers: In the last twelve months Portsmouth has endured 66 arson incidents. These incidents cost residents and the city over \$1,400,000. This dollar amount doesn't even pretend to take into account the financial and emotional distress to residents, lost business to our merchants, desirability impact on our neighborhoods and the negative impact on our tax revenues. Obviously, arson has a significant effect on each of us and our community.

Your fire investigators are very aggressive in the prosecution of arson in the City of Portsmouth. However, by its very nature, arson is one of the most difficult crimes to prosecute. There are rarely witnesses and the arson can actually destroy the evidence necessary for successful prosecution of a case. Nationally, only about 20 percent of arson cases are successfully prosecuted. Portsmouth's numbers are consistent with that.

So, how can we successfully address the arson problem? It requires teamwork on the part of firefighters, investigators and the community in which we operate. All our firefighters are trained to recognize the signs and evidence of arson. They are quick to inform investigators when they find them. Our investigators are also exceptionally well-trained before their assignments to the Fire Marshal Office and their training continues for the duration of their assignment. They utilize the most modern investigatory and forensics tools to solve arson cases. They work closely with police and other agencies to efficiently build cases. Unfortunately, their investigation means that the arson and its associated damage have already occurred.

The best possible situation is one in which we can prevent an arson from occurring in the first place. That is where we need your help. Consider the following steps to help us reduce arson activities in Portsmouth:

- Join you local neighborhood watch program.
- Notify the authorities when you witness unauthorized persons entering vacant or unoccupied structures.
- Keep your homes and businesses locked and well lit at night.
- Keep trash and other flammable materials away from you building.

And finally, just in case, have working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors installed and a good evacuation plan for you, your family and your employees.

Thanks for helping us to recognize Arson Awareness Week, and let's all do our best to keep Portsmouth the great place that it is!

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Fire Chief

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