

ARSON: Everyone's Problem

Rural property of any type is particularly vulnerable to vandalism and arson. Churches and other buildings which are not occupied daily present an easier target than do houses, stores or even schools.

At the same time, rural property will generally sustain more severe damage, even with an accidental fire, since discovery and response time may be delayed.

The occurrence of arson can be reduced, however, law enforcement cannot carry the entire load. Much of what must be done to prevent arson, just like other crime prevention, must be done by property owners. Interaction of property owners and their neighbors can do more to prevent crime than police patrols.

In the event an arson occurs, immediately notify your nearest fire department, your local law enforcement agency and the Alabama State Fire Marshal's Office. The state Fire marshal's Office can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling (334) 241-4166, or the Alabama Arson Hotline at

1-800-654-0775

Actions You Should Take Now

- Organize a neighborhood watch program. Establish a relationship with neighbors near the church so everyone will be more aware of people and vehicles in the area.
- Ask the local police or sheriff's department for advice and ideas in establishing a neighborhood watch program.
- Install identification program stickers at every door to each church building to warn burglars that all items of value have been marked for ready identification by police.



Alabama State Fire Marshals Office

A division of the Alabama Department of Insurance

**Post Office Box 303352
201 Monroe Street
Suite 1700
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-3352**

State Fire Marshal's Office: 241-4166

**Alabama Arson Hotline
1-800-654-0775**

ARSON IS A CRIME!

What you can do to protect your church property

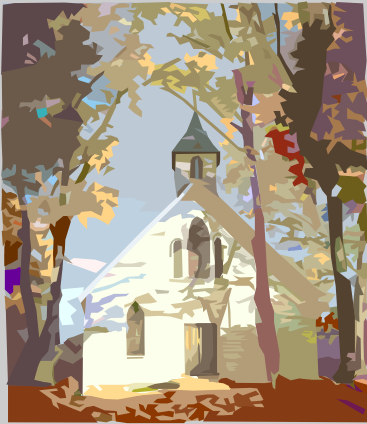


Department of Insurance: State Fire Marshal's office



More Immediate Action

- Place identification program bumper stickers on your vehicles.
- Place large neighborhood watch and identification program warning signs at strategic locations around and approaching the church property.
- Engrave valuables with an identifying number and photograph or videotape items which can't be engraved.



- Make a list of all church property in each building and photograph or videotape the entire interior and exterior of the buildings including all valuables which cannot be marked. Keep one copy of the list, photographs

and/or videotape at the church and another copy in a bank safety deposit box. Lists, photographs and videotapes should be updated, at least annually.

- Keep all doors and windows locked when no one is using the facility.
- Use electric timers and photoelectric devices to turn lights on, inside and outside the church, at sunset and off and sunrise.
- Install exterior lighting so that all dark spots are eliminated near any building.
- Install security and fire alarm systems which automatically sound an alarm in the event of burglary, smoke or fire. An alarm system which transmits an alarm to the police or fire department provides the best protection.

What can we do now?

- When possible, install a sound activated intercom between the church and the nearest neighbor, so they can hear any noise occurring inside the church when the building is not being used.
- Never leave keys hidden on church property which would provide anyone access to the buildings.
- Never store gasoline, kerosene, diesel fuel or other flammable or combustible liquids inside the church buildings.
- Avoid using candles, kerosene heaters or electrical extension cords inside the church.
- Keep shrubbery well trimmed; no higher than halfway up to the lowest window ledge, if possible.
- Never leave money inside the church, whether in a vault, safe, or vending machine.
- Keep areas immediately surrounding churches free of garbage or debris which might help fuel a fire.
- Report any suspicious activities around the church to your local police or sheriff's department and ask neighbors to do the same, especially when no church activities are normally scheduled.
- Discourage teenagers or others from using the parking lot as a gathering place, except during church activities.
- Report vandalism, thefts, or any other crime affecting church property to your police or sheriff's department immediately.
- Make sure church property is adequately insured. Shop around for coverage as some companies offer reduced rates for property protected by security and fire alarm systems.
- **Notify the Alabama State Fire Marshal's Office of any threats to burn or blow up a church by calling (334) 241-4166 or 1-800-654-0775.**

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE A FIRE

- **Immediately notify your fire department, along with your police or sheriff's department.**
- **If there is a reason to believe that the fire was arson, immediately notify the Alabama State Fire Marshal's Office at (334) 241-4166 or the Alabama Arson Hotline at 1-800-654-0775.**
- **Do not enter a burned building, especially if arson is suspected.**
- **Do not allow anyone other than fire fighters and law enforcement officials to enter the buildings.**
- **Do not allow anyone to remove anything from the building until the State Fire Marshal's Office releases it.**
- **Cooperate with investigators by providing any information they may request. Without complete cooperation, the chance of solving an arson case is dramatically reduced.**

ALABAMA ARSON HOTLINE

1-800-654-0775

**Department of
Insurance: State Fire
Marshal's office**

**Post Office Box 303352
201 Monroe Street
Suite 1700
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-3352**

**PHONE: 334-241-4166
FAX: 334-241-4158
E-MAIL: firemarshal@insurance.alabama.gov**

Steve Holmes, PIO: 334-240-4434