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Arson reduction agenda continues to be dominated by vehicle fires

The annual UK fire statistics for 2004 were published by the ODPM in February.

The number of deliberate fires decreased by 21% to 91,400, although this was primarily due to a 25% reduction in vehicle arson. The Fire Service attended 59,700 dwelling fires, estimated to be around one fifth of all domestic fires.

Arson

Arson in vehicles still accounts for 60% of all deliberately set fires, at 55,000 per year. Arson in buildings decreased by 14% in 2004 compared to 2003. There were 11,900 deliberately set fires in dwellings (down from 13,800) and 16,100 deliberately set fires in buildings other than dwellings (down from 18,700).

A number of specific building types were particular targets for arson in 2004. 71% of fires in private garages and sheds and 66% of fires in construction industry premises were deliberate. These are traditional targets for arson. 56% of school fires were deliberate, however APB figures suggest that up to 90% of large school fires could be started deliberately.

There were 840 school fires in the UK in 2004 compared with 896 the previous year. A slight increase in school fires in Scotland and Wales was offset by a decline in England and Northern Ireland. 40% of school arson fires in England occurred in the 7 Metropolitan counties, with the rest spread across the 40 non-Metropolitan counties.

In 2004 the UK Fire Service attended around 450,000 fires and 450,000 false alarms.

- Fires decreased by 29% compared with 2003.
- False alarms fell by 5%.

Smoke Alarm ownership

Smoke alarm ownership remains at around 80% across all households in the UK. However, within dwellings that suffered a fire, smoke alarm ownership was around 50%. Alarms were present and operated in just 32% of dwellings suffering a fire in 2004. However, this number is an increase on the previous year despite the number of households owning a smoke alarm remaining constant.



The majority of smoke alarms are now mains-powered, with 44% of households having battery-operated alarms. This follows a rise in the number of mains-powered alarms fitted in the last five years. There is a difference in failure rates – 39% of all battery-powered alarms failed in 2004 compared with 13% of mains-powered alarms.

Fatality rates in dwellings where a smoke alarm raised the alarm were 2 per 1,000 fires compared to 8 per 1,000 fires in dwellings where smoke alarms are either absent or did not function.

Fatalities

There were 88 fatalities in deliberate fires in 2004, down from 117 in 2003. The majority (48) occurred in dwelling fires, a figure that represents 13% of the total deaths in all dwelling fires. There were 2,800 non-fatal casualties in deliberate fires in 2004, 70% of which were in dwelling fires.

Delegates from Tyne and Wear attend US arson course

Tyne and Wear Fire Service recently sent two members of staff to undertake Fire Investigation Training in the USA. Here, Arson Reduction Manager Cathryn Donnell outlines their experiences.

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service are committed to 'Creating the Safest Community'. An integral part of this vision is to reduce deliberate fires. The Government target is to reduce deliberately set fires by 10% in 2009/10 from 2001/02 baseline. Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue has successfully attained this target and to date have decreased deliberately set fires by over 30% from 2001/02 base level.

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service Arson Task Forces were set up in 2001 with funding from the Arson Control Forum. They have had links with the United States, since a member of the team spoke at an international conference in 2002.

In 2003 Watch Manager James Ferguson and Detective Constable Tony Joyce of the Arson Task Force were invited to attend a course titled 'Advanced Origin, Cause and Courtroom Techniques.' This course was held at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centre, in Georgia and the program was designed to enhance the origin and cause investigative skills of a fire investigator.

The course involved the in-depth study of fire dynamics, fire chemistry, electrical fire causation, burn pattern analysis and fire scene documentation. Both candidates achieved a pass for the course with James Ferguson getting 100% for the theory examination.

Since coming back from this course James and Tony have run several fire investigation courses and investigated many fires. Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service Arson Task Force were the first ATF team to be invited to this course from the UK.

The course was run by two veterans of the US ATF, both having experience of the Oklahoma bombing and the Twin Towers incident.

The 9 day course was intensive covering theoretical aspects of explosives and devices. Although as fire investigators we do not investigate explosions of a terrorist nature, we do investigate scenes that have the same indicators, i.e. cylinder, natural gas and incidents involving fireworks.



The investigative techniques that have been acquired give James and Tony the ability to identify what evidence may be gathered and how the device was constructed and initiated.

James Ferguson said "Both of these courses have enhanced our knowledge of all aspects of fire and explosives investigation. Tony and I have used our training several times at fire investigations within the Tyne and Wear area, with great success. Tony and I are now running fire investigation courses cascading the information we learnt on both courses to those that carry out fire investigations including the rest of the Arson Task Force team."

James and Tony both got a lot from the courses and enjoyed every minute. They learnt so much from the courses that they are both undertaking Masters in Fire Investigation.

In 2003 the APB sponsored Nick Young from Davis Arnold Cooper to attend a fire investigation course in the U.S.A. Read his report on it: <http://www.arsonpreventionbureau.org.uk/Publications>

The National Framework and Strategy for Young People

The National Framework

The APB in conjunction with sister organisation the ABI have responded to the ODPM consultation on the Fire Service National Framework 2006/08. The National Framework provides statutory guidance to the Fire Service.

The APB response highlighted the need to ensure that the duty on the Fire Service to "reduce the commercial, economic and social impact of fires and other emergency incidents" is being met. Insurers and businesses have concerns that this duty is being overlooked. Recent insurance statistics show that insured fire losses have remained at a constant level over the last 5 years, and increased in 2005 to over £1 billion per year.

Our response also stressed that Fire Service resources should be directed where the likelihood and impact of a fire are greatest.

Households on the lowest income are 31 times more likely to suffer a fire than the average population. Despite being most at risk, household insurance penetration is lowest in this same group – half have no insurance cover. Therefore not only is the likelihood of suffering a fire greater, but the impact of that fire is also likely to be higher.

Arson reduction remains a key feature of the National Framework, with ABI estimating that arson results in at least £500million worth of claims annually.

When considering groups most at risk, APB argues strongly that the focus should not be on high-volume but low-impact vehicle arson. 20% of retailers suffered six or more incidents of vandalism (including arson) in the last year, according to Government stats. Fire Authorities have a major role in addressing business needs through local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

The Strategy for Young People

The APB and ABI also responded to the consultation on the Strategy for Young People set out by ODPM. APB welcomes the overall aims of the Strategy.

The APB response stressed that adequate training for fire services personnel and implementation of the strategy must be in place to ensure successful implementation of the Strategy. This will help to ensure joined up working with other agencies such as the Youth Justice Board and others involved in the protection of children and young people.



Fire Services should be provided with adequate resourcing to enable the effective training and provision of this work with young people. Without proper training and educational resources this project is unlikely to achieve the desired results.

Also highlighted was the importance of the dissemination of good practice that is already ongoing with regards to the work with young people that Fire Services carry out. The reasons why in the past this information has not been shared widely should be considered in order to ensure the problem is tackled effectively.

Further information, including the APB response to the Strategy for Children and Young People 2006/10 can be accessed at <http://www.arsonpreventionbureau.org.uk>

ABI publish latest fire loss figures

Latest ABI figures show the cost of commercial fire claims in 2005 was £791million - a record. This equates to just over £2 million paid out each day.

Last year's figure compares to £486 million paid out in 2004. The previous highest was £726million in 2002.

The APB's Jane Milne said:

" These figures provide a stark warning to all firms. While the number of fires may be falling, those that do occur are becoming more serious, putting not just lives, but business prosperity and jobs at risk. All firms must ensure that they have in place adequate fire management programmes, so that they can minimise the risk of suffering a potentially disastrous fire".



The Arson Prevention Bureau welcomes the news that the FPA are making arson reduction work a priority for 2006. APB looks forward to working with them on this issue.

Staff changes at APB

We have said a sad farewell to Katherine Ward who has left the APB. All at the APB would like to thank her for her contribution to the fight against arson.

Katherine's replacement as the APB's Communication Manager is Helena Flack. Helena joined the APB in February and will be responsible for the communications strategy and development of future initiatives of the APB.



If you have any queries, requests for APB publication, or any articles that you think could go in the newsletter, please contact Helena at helena.flack@abi.org.uk or on 020 7216 7522.