

Insight: Arson Control

Recognizing the Risk

Arson can be defined as a willful, malicious setting of fire to a structure or property. Intentionally set fires cost millions of dollars in property damage each year. According to a recent five-year study by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated average of 52,260 intentionally set structure fires that cost US\$815M in direct property damage each year.¹ Internationally, the Italian minister for ecological transition recently commented that 70% his country's fires were caused by humans- either accidentally intentionally with 90% in Sicily being arson wildfires.² And according to the U.S. FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR), for 2019 (the last full year reported), industrial/manufacturing structure arson events were highlighted as having the highest average dollar losses- an average of US\$190,336 per incident.³

While the motives for arson vary, common steps can be taken to greatly reduce the risk exposure.

Controlling the Hazard

The management of arson risk starts with evaluation of the most common inherent causes. This is assessing and addressing the primary reasons such events are successful in order to reduce the odds such an event can succeed. Such active risk management activities primarily relate to both fire and security premises protection. An arsonist can't start a fire if they do not have site access or there is no way to start a fire. Vigilance is also key – recognizing that the risk can always present leads to active risk management prevention programs diligently being maintained.

Risk control generally falls into two categories, Human Element and Physical Element. These respectively relate to human activity control and premises protection. Both are concerned with reducing the likelihood of an event occurring and reducing or mitigating the impact on the business should an incident occur. Risk prevention and, risk reduction should an attempt be successful.

Consider the following as you develop, evaluate, or refine safety programs:

- Ensure proper interior and exterior property lighting - intentional fires most often occur in the evening hours.
- Keep unoccupied buildings locked and monitored.
- Keep brush and combustibles away from the building, especially in areas known to be targets e.g., outside yard storage.
- Evaluate premises for potential security weaknesses and implement improved security measures as needed e.g., fencing, video surveillance, alarm systems, staffed security, controlled access.
- For cargo and transit exposures, ensure routes, contractors and security are heightened as needed based on routes and current events.
- For areas subject to wildfires, integrate a checklist of action items that can help to minimize risk e.g., routine removal of dead brush from close proximity to the buildings.
- Check reference prior to hiring new employees.
- Monitor disgruntled employees and increase security measures as needed.
- Maintain a monitored alarm system for cargo in transit.
- Maintain all fire protection systems in working condition including fire extinguishers.
- Develop/maintain an arson emergency response plan with regular review and training.

Through proper risk awareness and appropriate prevention and control measures, arson related risks can be properly managed to help assure a well-protected facility.

References & Resources

¹ <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/News-and-Research/Fire-statistics-and-reports/US-Fire-Problem/Fire-causes/osintentional.pdf>

² https://www.voanews.com/a/europe_arsonists-behind-more-half-italys-wildfires-officials-say/6209353.html

³ <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/arson>

U.S. Fire Administration Arson Awareness Week Home Page: <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/aaw/>

*While NFPA documents are the global standard used by AIG, international equivalents may be acceptable.

For more information, contact your local AIG Risk Engineer.

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