Fire Bugged

*Bushfire arson – now and beyond*

Matthew Willis

Australian Institute of Criminology

© Bushfire CRC Ltd. 2005
Outline of this presentation

- What have we done?
- What are we doing?
- What are we going to do?

...Why are we doing it?
FIREBUGS!

Brigades hunt down arsonists

‘Wicked’ arsonists light five more fires

Spreading fire and fear

© Bushfire CRC Ltd. 2005
Hunt them down

‘Acts of sheer bastardry’

Arson behind a state of misery

21 LUCIFERS

© Bushfire CRC Ltd. 2005
What is arson?

Arson is the act of intentionally and maliciously destroying or damaging property through the use of fire. It has two definitions: there are two core elements:

- Fire, the fundamental element of arson, if there is no fire (some legal definitions also include lighting explosives).
- Intention or malice — excludes fires started by natural causes or accidents.
- Malice — excludes fires started intentionally with positive or legitimate intent.
- Malice — there is some kind of property or object that is burned.

The element of fire is critical in a definition of arson. People deliberately light fires for many reasons, including for some legitimate and legitimate purposes. For example, people may light fires for controlled burning conducted as a controlled burn for fuel and land management purposes. In all these cases, the fire is deliberately lit but does not constitute arson as there was no intention to cause damage or harm or breach of the law.

In any of these cases, the fire may spread to both surrounding the fire site, creating a large fire and causing property and environmental damage and even injury or loss of life. Assuming there was no negligence or malice and there was no intent for controlling the fire, did all they reasonably could to keep the fire under control, there is no arson and no breach of the law because there was no intent to cause damage or harm.

The element of fire is not usually included in fire-related laws. In a strict sense, arson can be seen as a concept defined by legislation. Unless a court rules that the legal elements of arson have been proved in particular cases, arson in the strict sense has not occurred. In other words, arson is strictly defined as the setting or use of a property or object that is burned.

In the context of this bulletin, the broader categories of malicious and suspicious fires. Arson is defined as the setting or use of a property or object that is burned. The bulletin highlights the possibility that the fire may have been deliberately set.

For more information:


© Bushfire CRC Ltd. 2005
Arson topic section and bibliography


Australian Government
Australian Institute of Criminology

Home
Back
About crime and criminal justice
Arson

ARSON

What is arson?
The cost of bushfires
Arson legislation in Australia
AIC research and publications
Arson bibliography
Practical arson prevention resources
Links
www.aic.gov.au / topics / arson
A bushfire arson typology

Bushfires lit:
1. to create excitement or relieve boredom
2. for recognition and attention
3. for a specific purpose or gain
4. without motive
5. with mixed motives
Data collection & analysis
Bushfire causes - Australia

- Deliberate: 16
- Suspicious: 27
- Accidental: 23
- Natural: 6
- Other: 5
- Unknown: 22

Source: Australian bushfire causes (AIC file)
Bushfire causes - Australia

Source: Australian bushfire causes (AIC file)
Deliberately lit bushfires 1995/2004 (All Australian bushfires)

Source: Australian bushfire causes (AIC file)

© Bushfire CRC Ltd. 2005
Deliberately lit bushfires 99/00 to 02/03

Source: Australian bushfire causes (AIC file)
Mapping fire risk
Mapping fire ignitions
Mapping fire ignitions

© Bushfire CRC Ltd. 2005
### Causes of deliberate bushfires - NSW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AOFE</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignition</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspicious</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firesetter</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Bushfire CRC Ltd. 2005
‘Ben’ - serial bushfire arsonist

• 20 year old

• Convicted:
  – 25 fires
  – 2 hoax calls
Ben’s fires
Ben’s fires - Dooralong

At least 9 fires 22/9/-12/12
At least 3 fires 30/12 – 15/1
Ben’s home town fires
Ben’s fires - Lapstone

10 fires
21/2 - 20/3

© Bushfire CRC Ltd. 2005
Applications of current work

• Targeting & informing
  – education
  – prevention
  – justice responses
    • police
    • courts
    • corrections / juvenile justice
Fire Bugged

Bushfire arson - now and beyond

Matthew Willis
Australian Institute of Criminology

matthew.willis@aic.gov.au

61 2 6260 9232

© Bushfire CRC Ltd. 2005