



## Marion County Board of County Commissioners Marion County Fire Rescue

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### **ECONOMIC DOWNTURN MAY FUEL ARSON INCIDENTS**

Immediate Release

**MARION COUNTY, Fla.** (April 23, 2009) – With economic instability and unemployment rates rising, arson incidents may also increase as some people make desperate and illegal decisions without thinking about the possible consequences. That's why Marion County Fire Rescue (MCFR) in cooperation with the United States Fire Administration (USFA) is celebrating National Arson Awareness Week from May 3 through May 9, 2009.

The USFA theme is "Arson for Profit," focusing on insurance fraud, a criminal method of obtaining money for a fire-loss policy. Arsonists have targeted vehicles, residential homes, businesses or commercial properties and recreational equipment such as boats. The purpose of Arson Awareness Week 2009 is to bring attention to the unexpected consequences of arson.

"Arson for Profit" may seem like victimless crime, but arson affects everyone. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), 323,900 arson fires in the United States in 2005 resulted in 490 civilian deaths, 1,500 civilian injuries, three firefighter deaths, 7,600 firefighter injuries and more than \$1.1 billion in property damage. Arson fires are becoming more common than even smoking fires, according to the USFA's National Fire Incident Reporting System. Arson crimes also blur socioeconomic lines, not differentiating between the wealthy and non-wealthy.

Locally, MCFR experienced a slight bump in the number of documented arson fires, increasing from 28 during the 2006-2007 fiscal year to 31 in the 2007-2008 fiscal year.

Arson is a serious crime. Arsonists can face prison sentences ranging from one to 30 years, depending on the circumstances. Police can also arrest and charge children as young as seven years old with arson.

To help curb fire play, MCFR has a Juvenile Fire Setter Program. MCFR Fire Investigator Angie Sweeney, Fire Inspector Ken McCann and Captain Cliff Grier teach the two-hour class, offering it multiple times a year to children and teens between the ages of 4 and 16. Through use of videos, classroom instruction and discussion, participants see first hand the consequences of playing with fire. They also write essays on fire safety and prevention as well as hear stories from other fire starters. For more about that program, call MCFR Headquarters at (352) 291-8000. To report arson activity to law enforcement, call the Arson Alert Hotline at (800) 342-5869.

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