

Arson fighters need help from residents

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than many people know and ends up costing everyone."

Last year, nearly 14,000 of the 71,340 fires reported in Michigan were classified as arson or "suspicious." Related property damage was \$60 million or about 28 percent of all fire losses.

"We estimate that arson fires raise property insurance costs 20-30 percent," Buckles said. "Whether involving industry, business, homes or other property, they also can have a costly long-term effect. They wipe out jobs, reduce property tax revenues, cause blight and add to police and fire protection costs."

INSURANCE COMPANIES joined with various governmental agencies to form the Michigan Arson Committee in 1973. The Lansing-based committee is

working to increase awareness of the crime and to improve capabilities for detection.

"Two bills passed by state legislators in 1978 gave a big boost to this effort," he said. "The first created an Arson Strike Force within the Michigan State Police to concentrate on arson conspiracy and fire fraud investigations."

"The second set up a reporting system in which insurance companies forward information on suspicious fires to police for analysis and cross-checking. Resulting action is making it increasingly difficult for arsonists to operate successfully."

Evidence of the expanding effort to deal with the arson problem is borne out by arson arrests in the state, which were up more than 40 percent last year to total 1,013. State police officials credit this to more trained investigators and increased citizen involvement.

The Michigan chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators now has 350 members.

An added weapon in the fight is a reward program, supported by insurance companies and administered by the Arson Committee. Rewards up to \$1,000 are made for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction on arson-related charges. Included are inciting or exhorting to commit arson and conspiracy to commit arson, even

if a fire did not occur.

Anyone suspecting arson has been or will be committed can contact Arson Control, Box 23, Holt, MI 48842, or call collect call to 517-322-0489. The identity of callers will be kept secret if desired.

"THE PUBLIC is the first line of defense against arson," Buckles said. "Reporting suspicious fires to police, training youngsters to respect the

deadly dangers of fire and working with neighbors to safeguard one another's property will all help."

Revenge and juvenile vandalism are growing as motives for setting arson fires according to authorities. Michigan reports of arson fires in 1979 indicate 42 percent classified as revenge or maliciously motivated, compared to 22 percent for insurance fraud.

"Whatever the motive, if enough citizens remain alert to the threat of arson

and report any suspicious activity, we could swiftly reverse the growth of this crime," Buckles said. "Such action will save many lives and end up benefiting all of us."

The Michigan Association of Insurance Companies is a non-profit organization representing 45 property-casualty insurers. Headquartered in Lansing, its member companies write more than half of auto and homeowners insurance provided for Michigan residents.

Parkway symphony elects officers

At its annual meeting at Botzford Inn, Oakway Symphony Society elected a new slate of officers. Dick Thompson of Milford, provost of the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community

College, was elected president. Loraine Plesko of Farmington Hills, a Detroit elementary teacher, and Priscilla Marino of Bloomfield Hills, vice president of Advance Data Control,

were elected as vice presidents. Nelda Di Biasi of Livonia will continue as executive director, and outgoing president Iveline Harlan of Bloomfield Hills will serve as president emerita.

The office of treasurer will be held by Ruth Africh of Southfield. The offices of recording secretary and corresponding secretary will be held by Bob Boltwood and Mrs. V. Daniel.

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