

# This is Arson Awareness Week

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Taxpayers also pay when the fire department must respond to extinguish a maliciously set fire. And they pay in mental anguish when personal property is maliciously burned or when a family member or co-worker is injured or dies in an arson fire.

Injuries also can result in long-term costs involving burn care and reconstructive surgery. And property damage can blight a neighborhood, affecting property values, he added.

AT LEAST half of all actual fires in Farmington Hills during the last five years — other than grass or dumpster fires — were labeled arson, suspected arson or suspicious, Baldwin said.

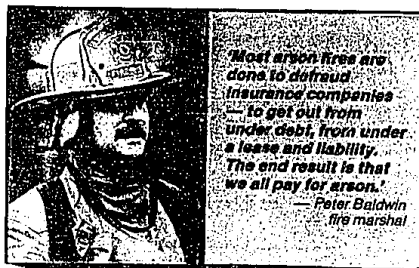
In 1985, there were 33 such fires, with a related dollar loss of \$431,285. The year before, 73 fires such were logged, with a related dollar loss of \$555,610.

Of the 33 such fires last year, 17 involved vehicles. Vehicles are more apt to be torched when their owners are in debt, says Baldwin. "People find the value of the car is not as great as the money they owe, or are having trouble with the car and can't sell it. So, in essence, they sell it to the insurance company to get some value out of it."

Through mid-April of this year, 15 arson, suspected arson or suspicious fires resulted in a property loss of \$702,000. Damage in a blaze at the Big Boy Restaurant on Halsted was estimated at \$600,000, Baldwin said.

In Farmington, arson, suspected arson or suspicious fires totaled three in both 1985 and 1984 — compared to actual fires of 58 and 57, respectively. The related dollar loss was \$10,000 in 1985 and \$500 in 1984. No such fires have been reported this year.

A lack of undeveloped places is why Farmington experiences few vehicle fires. "With every area of our three square miles built up, you



**Most arson fires are done to defraud insurance companies — to get out from under debt, from under a lease and liability. The end result is that we all pay for arson.**

— Peter Baldwin  
fire marshal

just don't have the privacy to do that," Wiggins said.

IN HIS executive declaration of Arson Awareness Week, Gov. Blanchard underscored that arson can only be stopped when people recognize the threat it poses.

"Cities, communities and neighborhoods are blighted by arson fires by erosion of the tax base and the loss of employment. Our educational system can be disrupted and irreplaceable historical buildings and artifacts can be destroyed as a result of the crime of arson. Natural resources can be rendered useless for long periods of time. And countless human deaths and injuries are needless tragedies," he wrote.

The governor praised the efforts of the Michigan Arson Prevention Committee's 11-year-old arson control reward program.

A reward of up to \$2,000 will be paid for information leading to the arrest or conviction of arsonists. Anonymous informants are welcome. Representatives of law enforcement agencies, fire departments and insurance companies are not eligible for rewards.

Suspicious or unusual activity that

could be fire-related can be relayed to either the fire department serving your area or to the State Arson Control Center: 1-800-44-ARSON. Nearly \$125,000 in reward money has been paid to tipsters.

"WE CAN come in as a fire department to determine that the cause of a fire was arson, but we still require information about individuals who may be involved," Baldwin said.

"We still need witnesses to tie in an individual who might have set the fire or who might have had a strong motive for setting the fire. Unless we have evidence against an individual, we can't prosecute."

Wiggins pointed out that bystanders often arrive at a fire before the fire department. "And they might see someone around a building or a vehicle leaving — something suspicious," he said.

"Even during a fire," he added, "bystanders have given valuable information that the firefighters, obviously preoccupied, missed."

"People sometimes see things they don't think are important but which may be the missing piece of evidence needed to solve a case."

# REWARD

PUT THE ARSONISTS WHERE THEY BELONG



UP TO  
**\$2,000**

FOR INFORMATION  
LEADING TO THE  
ARREST AND/OR  
CONVICTION OF  
ANYONE ON  
ARSON CHARGES

A Michigan Arson Committee arson control reward program poster.

## Call is out for volunteers

To paraphrase a slogan, the American Red Cross, Southeastern Michigan Chapter is looking for a few good kids.

If you are between the ages of 14 and 17 and enjoy meeting and working with people, want to serve your community or explore career opportunities, Red Cross has a place for you in its youth services program.

Have you ever thought about working with handicapped children or adults? As a Red Cross youth volunteer with the Easter Seal Camps, you can do just that. Camp activities include: assisting with outdoor games, crafts or on field trips to places like Boblo Island, the Belle

Isle Zoo or the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Do you like to clown around? As a Red Cross youth volunteer, you can be a member of a clown troop, entertaining people and inspiring smiles.

EVER THOUGHT about becoming a doctor or nurse? Red Cross can place you in a hospital or nursing home to observe what they do by volunteering with them side-by-side.

These are just three examples of the many volunteer opportunities Red Cross offers young people in the tri-county area. Other include: assisting at a blood collection center, a day care center, or a senior citizen

center. Red Cross youth volunteers telephone donors for special blood needs, perform clerical duties, or tutor children with reading problems.

Youth can choose to volunteer from one to three days a week, working five to six hours per day in the area they choose. All assignments are on a first-come, first-served basis.

Volunteers are signing up now for summer placement. For more information about becoming a youth volunteer, call Red Cross in Wayne County at 494-2858, in Macomb County at 778-5600 and in Oakland County at 334-3575.

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