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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AG Kaul Highlights Arson Awareness Week

MADISON, Wis. – Attorney General Josh Kaul is bringing attention to arson and fire during Arson Awareness Week (May 2-8, 2021). The Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) houses the State Fire Marshal’s Office and an Arson Bureau, with special agents that are called upon by local law enforcement and fire departments to assist with the investigation of fires and/or explosions involving unknown or suspicious circumstances.

Fire and explosion incidents frequently involve substantial property loss and may involve serious injury or death. According to key findings in the National Fire Protection Association’s 2019 fire loss data, local fire departments in the United States responded to an estimated 1.3 million fires that caused roughly 3,700 civilian fire deaths and 16,600 reported civilian fire injuries. Property damage was estimated at \$14.8 billion¹. These types of incidents can be devastating for a family and can cause considerable stress on a community, particularly when the incident was a result of an intentional act such as arson.

“Wisconsin DOJ’s Arson Bureau is a critical resource for law enforcement, fire departments, and victims across the state,” said Attorney General Kaul. “When a possible arson has occurred, the expertise of fire and explosion investigators can play a key role in the investigation.”

As deputy state fire marshals, special agents use the scientific method to conduct investigations of fires and explosions to determine the origin and cause of the fire and/or explosion. Deputy state fire marshals may qualify as a fire science expert witness and provide testimony in a court of law. In addition, many cases that the State Fire Marshal's Office investigates are linked to other crimes such as fraud or homicide.

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

The Office of the State Fire Marshal has one [ignitable liquid detection canine](#) (named Tutty), trained to alert in areas of fires that may contain potential accelerants. Tutty and his handler are certified by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and used by DCI agents and local law enforcement officers during their investigations both in-state and nationally.

There are many arson cases that remain unsolved because investigators need more information. The State Fire Marshal's Office requests the public's help by reporting to the Arson Tip Line maintained in partnership with the Wisconsin Arson Insurance Council. Individuals with information can call the toll-free tip line at 800-362-3005 and anonymously provide a tip or information. Should the information lead to the arrest and conviction of a subject, the caller could be eligible for a reward up to \$5,000.

Arson Awareness Week

Each year for Arson Awareness Week, the U.S. Fire Administration gathers and shares information to raise awareness of arson and provides individuals with strategies to combat these problems in their community. This year highlights critical actions that first responders must take to help ensure a safe response to arson fires during civil unrest incidents.

More information can be found here: <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/prevention/outreach/arson-during-civil-unrest.html>

Arson Week is also a good time to remind the public about home fire safety and prevention tips:

- **Smoke Alarms:** Make sure that your home is protected by working smoke alarms on every level of the home, including the basement. Interconnected smoke alarms provide the best protection because when one sounds, they all sound. Everyone in your home should know how to get outside and where to meet if the smoke alarm sounds. A smoke alarm with a dead or missing battery is the same as having no smoke alarm at all. Resolve to test all smoke alarms to make sure that they are working. Replace your smoke alarms when they are 10 years old or if they don't make sound an alarm when tested.

The Professional Firefighter's of Wisconsin Charitable Foundation is looking to reduce fire fatalities through the distribution of smoke alarms to fire departments across the state for installation in residences free of cost. This year the foundation has provided 3,600 smoke alarms to 30 fire departments. Citizens are encouraged to contact their local fire departments to determine what smoke alarm program may be available in their area.

- **Cooking:** Cooking is the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries. While preparing meals, remember to make safety the first ingredient. Stay in the kitchen when you are cooking at high temperatures, like frying, broiling or boiling. Fires can start when the heat gets too high. If you see any smoke or the grease starts to boil, turn the burner off.

- **Smoking:** Smoking materials are the number one cause of fire deaths and are preventable events. If you or someone in your household is a smoker, keep a sturdy ashtray or bucket of sand handy. Smoke only when you are alert. If you take medicine or get sleepy, don't smoke and never smoke near anyone who uses medical oxygen. If a fire starts, the oxygen will cause it to burn hotter and faster. There is no safe way to smoke when oxygen is in use.
- **Children:** If you have children living in your home or visiting, look for fire and burn dangers from their point of view. Never leave lighters or matches where children can reach them and be sure to teach children about fire safety from a young age.