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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AG Kaul Highlights Arson Awareness Week

MADISON, Wis. – Attorney General Kaul is bringing attention to 2020’s Arson Awareness Week, officially May 4-9. Wisconsin Department of Justice Division of Criminal Investigation houses the Office of the [State Fire Marshal](#) and an Arson Bureau, with special agents that are called upon by local law enforcement and fire departments to provide assistance 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. 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. According to a key finding in the [National Fire Protection Association’s fire loss data](#), an estimated 25,500 structure fires were intentionally set in 2018, an increase of 13% over the year before.

“The Arson Bureau in the Wisconsin Department of Justice provides a critical resource for local law enforcement, fire departments, victims and communities,” said AG Kaul. “The broad expertise required to serve as a fire and explosion investigator is unique and Wisconsin is lucky to have dedicated investigators working at DOJ and available to assist local jurisdictions as needed.”

As Deputy State Fire Marshals, the 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 classify fire events as accidental, natural, incendiary or undetermined. Fire classifications may be used for assignment of responsibility, reporting purposes and compilation of statistics.

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Deputy State Fire Marshals use various methods to collect, examine and document data and evidence in their investigations. Deputy State Fire Marshals may qualify as an expert witness in the area of fire science in a court of law for each case they testify in. Many incendiary cases investigated by the Office of the State Fire Marshal are linked to other crimes such as fraud or homicide.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal has one ignitable liquid detection [canine](#), trained to alert in areas of fires that may contain potential accelerants. The K-9 and handler, certified by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, are used by Deputy State Fire Marshals and local investigators during their investigations.

There are many arson cases that remain unsolved because investigators need more information. One way the public can help the Office of the State Fire Marshal and local investigators is through an Arson Tip Line maintained in partnership with the [Wisconsin Arson Insurance Council](#). Individuals with information can call the toll-free number 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 the crucial role that firefighters can play in a successful fire investigation. Firefighters are not just a first responder to the fire, but a first responder to the fire investigation as well. More information can be found here: https://www.usfa.fema.gov/prevention/outreach/arson_awareness.html
<http://arsoncontrol.org/tools-resources/national-arson-awareness-week/>

While this is Arson Awareness Week, it 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.

Fire Safety Plan: Make a fire safety plan and practice it with those within. Whether it be your home, your workplace, or another location, make sure there are working smoke alarms, multiple ways to exit, and have an outside meeting place for everyone who exits the structure.

Cooking: Cooking is the main cause of home fires and home fire injuries. While you're preparing healthier 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. 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.