



# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Mark A. Hartwig**  
*Fire Chief / Fire Warden*

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**CONTACT:** *Tracey Martinez, Public Information Officer*  
*(909) 387-5950, 800-426-8689, pager #3307*

## **May 3-9 is National Arson Awareness Week**

Southern California is no stranger to the destruction caused by wildfires. Sometimes these fires are caused by weather conditions, other times they are arson. The Old Fire of 2003, that destroyed almost one thousand homes and over 91,000 acres and six deaths, was caused by arson. That same year in San Diego County, the Cedar Fire ravaged over 280,000 acres when a flare was intentionally set.

Just last summer the Etiwanda fire burned over 2,100 acres north of Rancho Cucamonga, led to mandatory evacuations and multiple schools, including Chaffey College, to cancel classes. Three men were sentenced to jail and a fine of \$9 million for starting the Colby Fire in the San Gabriel Mountains. A juvenile was charged with arson for starting the Coco's Fire in San Diego County that ultimately destroyed over 3,000 acres and threatened a university, a spiritual center and hundreds of homes.

As we approach another fire season, in the midst of an historic drought, the threat of arson is more real than ever. The ongoing drought continues to cause wildfire activity to remain much higher than normal. Did you know approximately 95 percent of all wildfires are caused by human activity? This means most wildfires are preventable.

The National Fire Protection Association states an estimated 282,600 intentional fires were reported to U.S. fire departments each year between 2007-2011, with annual losses of 420 civilian deaths, 1,360 civilian injuries, and \$1.3 billion in direct property damage.

The National Interagency Fire Center reports that humans cause on average more than 62,000 wildfires annually, over 4,100 of those in Southern California alone. More than 2.5 million acres are burned each year by people who start wildfires, almost 298,000 in Southern California.

It isn't just wildfires that are set by arsonists. FEMA reports arson as the third leading cause of fatal residential building fires in 2012 and from 2003-2012 five percent of all residential fires were caused by arson. The same report states that 10.5 percent of nonresidential fires are intentional.

What can you do to help? We need you to be the eyes and ears for County Fire. Keep an eye out for suspicious activity in your neighborhood. Write down vehicle information, including license plate number, and a description of the occupants. See someone discarding a cigarette out the window, call 9-1-1.

Arson Investigators are asking for the communities help. If you or someone you know has information regarding an arson case, please contact San Bernardino County Fire at 909-386-8400 or call WeTip at 1-800-47-ARSON (800-472-7766).

For more information about fire safety or arson awareness, please visit [www.sbcfire.org](http://www.sbcfire.org).

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