Arson Prevention

According to the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), arson is the leading cause of fires in the United States, resulting in more than $1 billion in property loss each year.

At GuideOne Insurance, arson is one of the leading causes of claims, along with open flames, electrical fires and lightning. The mental and emotional loss of a building due to arson can be as great as the physical damage itself.

Your facility can decrease the chances that an arsonist will strike by undertaking an arson and crime prevention program. This fact sheet provides information on why organizations are vulnerable to arson and what they can do to protect themselves from this crime.

Why Organizations Are Vulnerable

- Buildings are often unoccupied.
- Activity schedules are predictable.
- Security systems are often lacking.
- Arsonists, vandals and other criminals may target organizations because of their beliefs or values.

Reducing the Risk of Arson

To help reduce the risk of arson, consider the following precautionary measures:

Building Exterior

- Illuminate exterior buildings, doors and parking lots from sunset to sunrise.
- Consider the installation of motion-activated lighting near doors and windows.
- Keep doors and windows locked when the building is unoccupied.
- Trim shrubs and tree limbs around windows and doors to eliminate potential hiding places for arsonists and criminals.
- Ladders should not be stored outside the building at the end of the day. Instead, secure ladders



The photo above demonstrates how to properly store a ladder outside the building using a good quality lock and chain that is securely attached to the building's concrete foundation.

and tools in a locked shed/outbuilding or inside the building. If this is not possible, secure ladders outside with a high-quality chain and lock.

- Keep track of and limit the disbursement of building keys. Consider installation of a keyless electronic entry system.
- Make sure that exterior doors are of solid core (not hollow) construction and are outfitted with quality deadbolt locks and, if hinged on the outside, tamper-proof hinges.
- Use wire-mesh glass in windows for additional protection from break-ins.
- Keep the property free from boxes, leaves, trash, wood and other potentially combustible debris.
- Consider installing video security cameras at entrances and other key areas.
- Park vehicles in differing locations on the property throughout the week to vary routine.
- Trash containers should be kept as far away as possible from the building.

Building Interior

- Consider using timers or automation products for lights and/or radios during evening hours. Timed use of interior entry lights overnight should be considered.
- Make sure that flammable liquids are stored in a U.L. listed fire cabinet away from any heat sources, such as heating equipment.
- If possible, install a central station monitored security/fire detection system. Also consider a fire sprinkler suppression system.
- Make sure that smoke and heat detectors are operational and that fire extinguishers are in place and have been regularly serviced.
- Restrict access to areas containing valuable or combustible materials by locking interior doors.



The photo above shows a trash dumpster that is overflowing and too close to the building. If vandals were to intentionally set fire to the dumpster, there is a high likelihood that it would spread to the building.

General Precautions

- Ask neighbors to alert police if anything suspicious is seen on church property.
- Develop positive relationships with local law enforcement and invite them to patrol the property during the overnight hours.
- Establish a program in which volunteers drive through the property at various times throughout the week.

Arson Prevention Checklist

Checklists can be an effective tool to provide a safer environment. Answer the following questions relating to external, internal, and awareness measures you can take to

determine how well your facility is safeguarded to discourage unauthorized entry and encourage early fire detection. A "NO" answer indicates an area that may warrant further examination.

External Measures	Yes	No
Does lighting sufficiently illuminate all sides of buildings and parking areas?	☐	☐
Do all exterior doors have deadbolt locks and non-removable hinge pins?	☐	☐
Is a process in place to make sure that building doors and windows are locked when it is unoccupied?	☐	☐
Is access to roofs, fire escapes and outside stairways limited to authorized persons?	☐	☐
Is shrubbery trimmed to prevent it from being used for hiding?	☐	☐
Are loose materials and trash removed from the grounds daily?	☐	☐
Are windows and glass entries protected with wire mesh or bars? (Note that for emergency purposes, window bars must be able to be opened from the inside)	☐	☐
Is there fencing or controlled access to the property?	☐	☐
Is access to crawl spaces and basement entry points secured?	☐	☐

Internal Measures	Yes	No
Are foyer and hall lights left on at night?	☐	☐
Are windows and doors equipped with proper locks, jams and/or deadbolts?	☐	☐
Is there a central station alarm system for notification of fire, smoke or breach of security?	☐	☐
Are personnel assigned to secure the building daily (for example, locking doors and windows and activating security systems)?	☐	☐
Are personnel assigned to check for unauthorized occupants?	☐	☐
Are building keys controlled by a strict sign-out policy and marked "do not duplicate?"	☐	☐
Are locks changed or re-keyed when keys cannot be retrieved?	☐	☐
Are valuable objects and combustible materials securely locked away from sight?	☐	☐

Awareness measures build teamwork and ownership attitudes among members	Yes	No
Do the police routinely check the premises?	☐	☐
Is a “Watch” program in place?	☐	☐
Are staff and volunteers made aware of building use, security and fire prevention measures?	☐	☐
Have neighbors been asked to report any suspicious activity on church property to the police?	☐	☐

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