

Arson, sociology



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Arson seems as though it is a major problem in the United States; however, this is not the case. Arson is defined as a person who intentionally burns almost any kind of structure or building. Even though arson is not a common crime, it has resulted in \$585 million in property damage and the death of 200 civilians in 2010. Arson is committed for many reasons including insurance fraud and revenge. My theory is that the leading reason for arson is for people to gain money. The people affected by arson are the ones that lose their homes, jobs or even a family member or friend.

For starters, why would someone even want to burn property? Many people assume that the people that are setting these fires are always troubled teenagers acting in revenge, but in fact, revenge related fires involving teenagers is decreasing as a cause for arson. The more common reason for committing arson is so a person can lie to the insurance company and gain money. Sometimes business owners even hire professional arsonists to burn down their business without leaving a trace of arson. This reason is becoming more prevalent in society than troubled teenagers.

Another, however least common, reason for a person to commit arson is because they enjoy watching the flames consume the building or other structure. In other words, that person would be a pyromaniac. People also intentionally set fires to cover up another crime such as murder. To continue, what happens to the people that are affected by the arson? If the property that was damaged was a place of business, than the people that work there would be out of a job. If there is a fire than people in the surrounding area would lose tax dollars.

Without the tax dollars, people would lose out on various public services. If a house is burned down, then the family would be without a home, their belongings, and their memories that were in the house. The family would have to struggle to get back on their feet and will have to start out new. The worst outcome for arson is if someone is injured or killed from the fire. Sometimes people are in the wrong place at the wrong time and if they happen to be in the same building when the arsonist starts the fire, then the victim could be seriously burned or have too much smoke inhalation or get burned alive.

Arson does not just affect the owners of the houses or businesses, but arson can also kill firefighters. When firefighters go into these fires to save someone else or put out the fire, they are risking their lives. Also, what happens to a person if they commit the crime of arson? The conviction of arson depends on two factors. The first factor depends on the type of property issue. The second factor is whether or not someone was injured in the fire. The penalty for arson can vary between many years in prison to the death penalty (if someone else was murdered in the fire).

Setting one's own property on fire does not resort to arson laws unless one sets fire to their own property due to financial fraud or the fire causes injury or damage to another person's home, land or property. In 2011 it was reported that there were 70 offenses of arson in York, Pennsylvania (FOCUS). Overall about .016% of people commit this crime, which is a small amount, but the financial and emotional damage that comes from arson, is far exceeds the amount of people that commit the crime. For all the fires that

have been reported, 17% of these fires have been a result of arson. Finally, arson destroys homes, jobs, and even vehicles.

Most often people assume that teenagers who are having a rough time in their family resort to arson. This is not true and more often than not people are set their homes and businesses ablaze in order to gain money. If the person has insurance on their homes or businesses than if their home or businesses is on fire they get money to replace the items lost or possibly replace the business. Most people assume that they can easily get away with this, but they do not think about the smallest details. In a normal fire at a home or businesses there are usually scrap pieces of metal left behind after the fire.

If a person removes their furniture or equipment from the home or business, than those key scraps of metal will not be there and then it would be evident that the fire was purposefully set. Firefighters can also tell that the fire was intentionally set if the arsonist does not think about where they are going to put the fire. If the fire is not set at an area where there would be "normal" cause then this is a flag to firefighters. Firefighters also look for any evidence of accelerants to find out if the fire was actually arson. Dogs that are trained to smell specific accelerants are brought to the crime scene.

Investigators also use ultraviolet, infrared and nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy to identify accelerants. Investigators might also look at how the fire progressed to determine its origin and cause. However, in some cases an accelerant is not needed to cause a fire; therefore, it is harder to convict a person of arson. As a result of arson, there have been agencies created by

federal and state law enforcements to investigate and prosecute any arson cases. Even the insurance companies have created SIU's, special investigative units, to investigate any claims of arson.

The insurance companies have also warned insurance consumers about fraud. With all of these precautions, it is hard for people to commit arson and get away with it. To conclude, arson can leave an emotional scar on its victims that are difficult to place a numerical value to it. Arson is a severe crime and in some cases the criminal can be charged with life or the death penalty. Arson is committed by people that either like the “ thrill” of it, have revenge against a person or group, want to hide another crime such as murder, and/or they want to make money.