

Hardfacts

Norwich Union Risk Services

Ref No 1003 (v3)

August 2006

Minimising the Risk of Arson in Small Businesses

Introduction

In the last two decades arson (malicious ignition) has significantly increased as a cause of industrial and commercial fires in the UK.

In 2003 there were over 3000 arson attacks on shops, cafes and small businesses according to UK Fire Statistics.

Hazards

Around a half of those found guilty or cautioned for arson in England and Wales between 1995 and 1999 were males aged under 18. Most malicious fires are started during hours of darkness. However this does not mean that premises are safe during working hours as fires are easily started in commercial and industrial premises that are not continuously occupied.

In buildings, most malicious fires occur in storerooms and warehouses which provide both cover and fuel and are often unoccupied. In the open, fires are frequently started in waste, rubbish, undergrowth and stacks of combustible material such as timber.

The following paragraphs suggest how the risk of arson can be minimised.

Assessing the Risks

Carry out an arson risk assessment:

- Identify the susceptibility of the building and the security measures adopted – both internally and externally
- Identify the potential hazards e.g. presence of combustible materials, sources of ignition
- Identify the potential arsonist – intruders, visitors, contractors, staff
- Eliminate, control or avoid the threat identified
- Review existing security and fire arrangements
- Record the findings

- Review the assessment periodically.

Responsibility

- The owner or a manager needs to be made responsible for fire safety including protection from arson attack
- Be aware of any fires in the locality or any other forms of vandalism e.g. graffiti. Graffiti and any other damage needs to be removed/repaired immediately.

Physical Security - Externally and Internally

- Perimeter fences, walls and gates - keep in good repair. These should be high enough and strong enough to deter entry
- All points of entry should be supervised. If this is not possible, those which are left unattended should be locked (apart from fire exits)
- Doors, windows and any other accessible openings, e.g. rooflights and hatches – ensure the building is secure with good quality locks
- Know the location of all keys – chase up any that are missing
- If possible, loading bays, doors and windows should be located well back from main gates and other points of entry
- Gaps beneath external doors should be kept as small as possible and sealed where practicable
- Letter boxes, when integral to the building, should have metal receptacles fitted on the inside
- The provision of good lighting is a valuable deterrent. Well lit premises are less likely to be attacked
- Make a named individual responsible for securing the building at the end of each working day.

Fuel Denial

- Keep ignition sources to a minimum
- All hazardous goods such as flammable liquids and gas cylinders should be locked in special stores when not in use and particularly at the end of the working day. Petrol and diesel pumps should be immobilised.
- Process waste and rubbish should be cleared away at the end of each day and more often if necessary. This is

particularly important in storage areas. It should not be allowed to accumulate in secluded areas, eg, under stairs and at the back of the building. Arrange regular collections of refuse and waste by the Local Authority or a contractor

- Combustible storage, including waste in skips, in the open should be as far away as possible from the buildings and also perimeter fences and walls
- Vegetation, which acts as both fuel and cover for the arsonist should be cut short and the cuttings removed.

Staff Precautions

- When recruiting staff, references should always be taken and followed up. This is particularly important with regard to warehouse or other staff who are likely to be left unsupervised
- Maintain good staff relations
- Supervisory staff should be reminded of their responsibilities to minimise the potential for arson
- Staff should be encouraged to check the credentials of anyone who should not be on the premises and report any suspicious behaviour - by anyone
- The layout of the premises should be designed to avoid the need for employees to pass through storage or similar unmanned areas. If this is not possible, special attention should be paid to security in these areas, such as screening off storage by a wire fence.

Visitors / Contractors

- Control the movement of visitors, customers and suppliers. Ensure they do not have access into staff-only areas
- Casual labour, outside contractors or any other persons working out of normal hours should always be supervised.

Intruder and Fire Detection

- Automatic intruder alarm. If physical security measures are breached it is important that an intruder is detected early. Provide good coverage and ensure there will be a response to the alarm, if activated, by linking to a 24 hour manned alarm receiving centre using a secure monitored connection
- CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) coverage can act both as a deterrent and possible means of identification of an intruder or fire-raiser
- Automatic fire/smoke detection systems (possibly linked in with an intruder alarm)

detect and locate fires in their early stages and so help to minimise damage

- Security lighting (linked to movement detection) also provides a useful deterrent.

Fire Protection

- Regularly ensure extinguishers are in their correct positions and with any hose reels, check they are in good working order
- Carry out appropriate weekly bell tests on sprinkler installations and automatic fire alarms.

Key Action Steps

- Take responsibility and be vigilant
- Carry out an arson risk assessment, record the findings and periodically review the assessment
- Review security and fire precautions
- Provide staff training and remind staff about the risks of arson
- Do not allow waste and rubbish to accumulate internally or externally
- Control visitors, customers and contractors.

Sources of Further Information

Your local Fire Brigade
Arson Prevention Bureau – Tel 020 7216 7474 or www.arsonpreventionbureau.org.uk
The Fire Safety Advice Centre - www.firesafe.org.uk/html/guides/arson.htm

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Norwich Union Risk Services operates a Risk Helpline during normal business hours for the cost of a local telephone call. The telephone number is:

0845 366 66 66

www.nu-riskservices.co.uk