



# **Arson Reduction** *strategy*





*"Making  
Merseyside safer"*

# Arson Reduction

## strategy

### Introduction

Deliberate fires are the largest single cause of major fires in the UK. Arson is a problem that leads to loss of life, serious injuries and results in substantial financial and personal hardship.

It is a sad fact that fire discriminates. Research has shown that those most likely to be at risk from deliberate fires are in the lower socio-economic groups. Arson rates are 30 times higher in poorer areas with a 15 times increased chance of death compared to 'affluent' areas. Arson leaves a 'scar' as well as a hazard in the heart of areas where people live. Such a symbol can then encourage other anti-social behaviour that creates a downward spiral of events.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has taken active steps to be a significant player to improve community well-being by joining with partners to reduce arson. The main strands to this partnership working is the active participation of the Fire Service Personnel at strategic level on the "Safer Merseyside Partnership" and at Metropolitan District Level at each of the "Crime and Disorder Reduction Panels". Emanating from this has been the creation of an "Arson Task Force" which is in the embryonic stage of Police and Fire Officers working as a joint team to identify areas of arson and then putting in place intervention measures to reduce levels. This then supports the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service vision of "Making Merseyside Safer".

The Government has set out its vision for the future in the recently published White Paper 'Our Fire and Rescue Service'<sup>1</sup> which includes setting Government targets for arson reduction by 2010. This Arson Reduction Strategy details how Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service intends to achieve such reductions and will be kept under constant review to monitor performance.

Tony McGuirk  
Chief Fire Officer  
Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

<sup>1</sup> *Our Fire & Rescue Service, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, June 2003*

## **Background**

Arson is currently the largest single cause of fire in the U.K, with arson related fires costing our society, over £1.3 billion a year. In the last ten years there have been 1.7 million arson fires, resulting in 22,000 injuries and 1,100 deaths.

In an average week in the U.K. arson results in

- 3,500 deliberately started fires
- 50 injuries
- 2 deaths
- a cost to society of at least £25 million.

On Merseyside, there were 23,218 arson incidents last year, with these incidents representing 56% of the total emergency response. As with other characteristics of social deprivation, arson is not evenly spread throughout Merseyside. National research shows that those on the lowest incomes suffer rates of arson fires thirty times higher than elsewhere and are fifteen times more likely to die as a result of a fire.

Arson is, strictly speaking, a criminal act defined by the Criminal Damage Act 1971, and only offences that meet the definition of the act can be properly termed arson. This has led to confusion between the fire service, the police and other agencies when recording arson. Other terminology that is often used to describe arson type incidents are deliberate fires, malicious fires and fires of doubtful origin. This confusion was identified in the Home Office report 'Safer Communities: Towards Effective Arson Control'<sup>2</sup>, for simplicity the report opted to refer to all deliberate/malicious or non-accidental fires by the term arson. This document will adopt the same approach.

To illustrate this fact locally, in 2001-2002 Merseyside Fire Service recorded 20,991 arson incidents. By contrast Merseyside Police recorded 683 offences of arson.

However, Merseyside Police do recognise the devastating impact of arson and already commit resources to reduce this menace and work in partnership with the Fire Service.

## **The Cost of Arson**

The cost of arson can be broadly divided into four main areas;

1. The cost to people
2. The cost to the community
3. The cost financially
4. The cost to the environment

<sup>2</sup> Safer Communities: Towards Effective Arson Control - Home office 1999

## 1. The cost to people

Arson fires can often devastate whole families to an extent not matched by other crimes. Fire at worst causes death but fire can also leave victims with injuries which cause a lifetime of pain, leaving permanent physical and mental scars. Against such a background it is difficult to attribute monetary value to fire casualties.

The sight of arson damaged properties and burned out cars can take their toll upon an area. They give the impression that society as a whole has given up on their community; they make decent people feel unsafe, destroys the feeling of community well-being and perpetuates the fear of crime.



## 2. The cost to the community

It is extremely difficult to gauge the social cost of arson upon a community. However it is obvious that a serious fire within a commercial property can lead to loss of production and subsequent unemployment. In addition to this there is the impact and disruption that the loss of a local amenity such as a school or sports centre can have.

In the case of a deliberate fire at a school, the damage goes far beyond the school itself. Years of preparation work by teachers, is destroyed along with irreplaceable work from students. Large numbers of pupils are displaced to other schools who may not have the capacity to cope with the influx so, potentially the fire can damage a whole generation.

Smaller fires cause communities to lose pride and respect in their surroundings with subsequent loss of business investment. This petty arson can be one of the factors in a downward spiral of socio-economic decline, this is known as the 'broken window' theory. This suggests that if a 'broken window', that is a relatively minor incident is ignored it will then attract graffiti and further minor vandalism. This in turn leads to the building being a target for break-ins and more serious vandalism, ultimately resulting in arson and the eventual dereliction of the building/site.

### 3. The cost financially

The Association of British Insurers, estimates that approximately 50% of all fire related insurance claims are as a result of arson. Figures based on data collected in 2002 suggest that arson costs the insurance industry £1.6 million per day, or £584 million per year. Although these are clearly huge sums of money, the ABI estimates that, for the following reasons, these figures underestimate the true financial cost of arson.

- Not all insurers are represented by the ABI;
- Most Local Authorities have mandatory policy excess in the region of £100,000;
- Claims not paid by insurers due to suspicion of fraud;
- Uninsured losses;
- Losses dealt with by HM Government.

### 4. Cost to the Environment

We must not underestimate the damage that a fire can cause to the environment. When something burns toxic gases are produced, the toxicity of these gases is dependant upon the item, or combination of items being burned. In the case of a vehicle fire large amounts of toxic smoke are produced, in addition to this water used during fire fighting can pollute sub soils and water draining systems.

In urban areas our heritage is our environment. Merseyside has a rich heritage of buildings, many buildings are listed and recognised as being of extreme architectural importance. Fire destroys these buildings and our heritage is lost forever.

In rural areas arson fires involving heath land and forested areas can cause immense damage, upsetting delicate local eco-systems and wildlife habitat, from which it may take years to recover.

### **Arson: Who does it and why?**

There are many reasons why people light fires, and these can be best broken down into the following categories: <sup>2</sup>

<b>Category of Arson</b>	<b>Motivation</b>
Youth disorder & nuisance	Vandalism and boredom
Malicious	Revenge Racism Clashes of beliefs/rivalries Personal animosity
Psychological	Mental illness Suicide
Criminal	Financial gain and fraud Concealment of other crimes

<sup>2</sup> Safer Communities: Towards Effective Arson Control, Home office 1999

It is clear that a single approach to arson will not be successful, and that a number of different intervention policies need to be developed in order to deal with each category. A policy based on deterring potential arsonists based on prosecution may be successful with those committing arson for criminal reasons, but not for those with psychological reasons, for example.

The following table shows the estimated proportions of each type of arson:

	<b>Property</b>	<b>Vehicle</b>
Youth Disorder	36%	39%
Malicious	25%	3%
Psychological (Emotional Expression)	26%	13%
Criminal	13%	45%
Total number in 2000	32,200	70,800

The table<sup>3</sup> illustrates the significance of youth disorder for both property and vehicle arson, yet courts mainly intervene with older people. Policies that address youth disorder directly are likely therefore to have a major impact on arson as a whole. Given the likelihood that many of these acts of arson are committed by individuals local to the fire, in a social context that may go some way to facilitate the action, leads to the perspective that the community related strategies diverted to young people may be particularly effective.

Information from the judicial system indicates that of those who are prosecuted in the courts for arson, 68% are adult males and 13% adult females. Another 19% were young people under the age of 18. Overall some 15% of arsonists prosecuted are female and this figure has increased in recent years. Nationally however the prosecution level is very low for this type of crime. For the perhaps conservative official figure of 30,000 arson offences committed, there were only 2,500 prosecutions in any one year. Of those 2,500 some 500 are aged 10 to 17 years old.

## **Arson Incidents**

### **Vehicle Arson**

The number of accidental car fires has been declining whilst the number of deliberate vehicle fires has more than trebled in the past decade, and they now account for over half of the arson fires that fire services attend each year.

<sup>3</sup> *The Burning issue: Research and Strategies for Reducing Arson, Office of the Deputy Prime minister, Aug 02*



The table below illustrates the dramatic increase in recent years on Merseyside:

Year	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02
Number of Vehicle Arsons	934	1899	2904	3078	3430

There are various reasons for vehicle arson, such as stolen vehicles subsequently burned to conceal evidence of a crime, owners committing insurance fraud, and contract hire vehicles burned to conceal excessive mileages. However there is increasing evidence to show that many vehicles are set alight as a result of being dumped by their last owner. Currently the second hand car market is depressed resulting in the availability of cheap cars, with little incentive to repair defective cars, this coupled with a low scrap metal price, and increasing environmental disposal costs is likely to compound the problem further.

### Arson Attacks on the Home

A range of factors motivates arson attacks on the home, but undoubtedly revenge, vandalism and false insurance claims are amongst the most frequent.

Hostels and houses in multiple occupation usually involve the use of shared facilities. In these premises there may be a degree of overcrowding, different languages may lead to misunderstandings, and disputes can arise over shared areas.

These, together with disagreements over noise can eventually lead to arson. Rubbish left on stairways and communal landings where young people congregate has also been the target of deliberate fire setting. This creates a significant threat with large numbers of people trying to escape via a limited number of exits.

### Arson Attacks on Schools

Over 70% of school fires are started deliberately. In the UK, every 3 days there is a serious school fire, deliberately started that creates a staggering £100 million annual repair bill.

Schools are often seen as a soft target containing attractive materials and equipment. For many years schools were designed to be open and accessible with little in the way of perimeter protection. Fires in schools tend to spread rapidly, there are usually large amounts of combustible material, and some construction methods have proven to lead to rapid fire spread. To combat this, Merseyside Fire Service is embarking on a programme to promote the value of sprinkler systems.

Merseyside Fire Service responded to 56 arson school fires in 2002.

### Arson Attacks on places of Worship

Churches and other places of worship are often easy targets for the arsonists. They may often have poor security arrangements and valuable contents to attract an offender. It is possible that arson may be used as a means of destroying evidence of a crime, or fires may be associated with vagrants who may light fires accidentally or deliberately, possibly whilst under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.



### Arson in Commerce and Industry

Arson is an increasingly significant factor in fire losses and industrial and commercial buildings are major targets for arsonists. Arson attack against industry and commerce is not just a crime against property for which the insurer will pay, the losses can also involve:

- Deaths and injuries to staff and fire-fighters
- Business interruption, or even closure of the company



- Loss of jobs
- Loss of facilities or amenities for the community
- Pollution of the air by smoke and possibly water pollution as a result of water used in the fire-fighting operations
- Loss of industrial heritage

To provide an illustration of the above, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service dealt with a major fire at a night club in Liverpool City Centre in 2002. The premises was so badly damaged that it ceased trading. However the loss was more than just the premises, the venue was part of both the local and national music and dance scene.

### Rubbish Fires and other small fires

These fires, sometimes known as nuisance fires, are particularly problematic. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service attended 17,869 of these incidents last year. Sometimes the rubbish may be placed against, or near, property creating the potential for fire spread. Equally of concern, these incidents deflect Fire Service resources away from other emergencies or life saving community safety work.

## **MERSEYSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY RESPONSE**

### Partnerships

The fire service cannot tackle arson in isolation. Although we are probably the organisation that is affected the most by arson, many others are affected or have a significant role to play in arson reduction.

Agencies such the Local Education Authority, Local Authority (LA) Environmental Services, (LA) Housing Departments, Housing Trusts, Private Landlords, LA Leisure Services, LA Planning, Social Services, Transport Organisations, LA Youth Services, Voluntary Youth Services, Youth Offending Teams, Neighbourhood Watch,

Neighbourhood Warden Teams, Local Business groups, Media, The Probation Service, Victim Support and Police can all be valuable partners against arson.

### The Safer Merseyside Partnership

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is a member of The Safer Merseyside Partnership (SMP). SMP provided funding to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service toward the appointment of a dedicated Arson Reduction Manager who is the lead officer on the newly formed Arson Task Force. This team is tasked with developing partnerships that will reduce arson and thus contribute to the fire authority's overall aim of creating a safer community.

### Crime, Disorder Reduction Partnerships

Merseyside Fire Service has nominated officers that attend the five district Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRP's). Merseyside Fire Service is also represented on relevant Joint Agency Groups (JAGs). These local forums provide the opportunity to work with partners and respond to problems and issues within local communities.

This partnership working will continue to develop within the CDRP's and include strategies to reduce incidences of arson.

### Partnerships with the police

If an arson strategy is to be successful, then strong partnership working with the police is essential. The police have an ever-increasing workload, and arson forms only a small part of that work. The fire service must recognise that police time committed to arson is used to the maximum benefit of both agencies.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and Merseyside Police will work within an arson and fire investigation protocol. This will ensure a measured response to the arson problem. It will ensure that the management information systems are compatible, and information can be shared to maximum effect. Information collected from arson incidents will form a database capable of interrogation that will identify arson patterns and trends. The intelligence gained will form the basis of specific strategies required to tackle each issue. This will ensure the efficient and effective use of resources.

As part of their commitment to the partnership, Merseyside Police have seconded a police officer to work within the fire service. This is the foundation of a dedicated Arson Task Force, and it is anticipated that other members will be recruited from key partner agencies to contribute to effectiveness of the team.

### Incident Investigation Team

In 2000 Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service created a dedicated Incident Investigation Team, to perform detailed investigations into causes of fires. The team works in partnership with Police Crime Scene Investigators to analyse evidence and detect causes of arson. The team have been frequently called as witnesses in the subsequent prosecution of "arson" offenders. This dovetails into our objectives of detecting and prosecuting "arson" offenders within Merseyside.



An investigation protocol has now been agreed between Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service. Specifically this refers to the Incident Investigation Team and Merseyside Police Scenes of Crime Officers jointly investigating arson incidents to enhance the prospect of detection and subsequent prosecution.

### Fire Reduction through Engagement and Education (FREE team)

In March 2002 the Fire Authority approved the creation of a team of six ("FREE" Team) from within the existing establishment. This is a direct response to the high prevalence of young people who are committing arson.

The "FREE" Team have set up a series of training programmes to tackle the root causes of fire in the community. Young arson-offenders often come from marginalized sections of those communities, and do not fully understand the impact that their actions have on local communities. These young people are often at risk of exclusion from school or have already been excluded. The courses are designed to help young people who pose a potential fire risk become the fire safe citizens of the future by:

- Educating socially-excluded young people in the importance of fire safety;
- Helping arson-offenders understand the true consequences of their actions and prevent re-offending;

- Providing positive role models and activities to help course participants develop confidence and self-esteem, and raise those aspirations.

### Prince's Trust Volunteer Courses

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has been a delivery partner with the Prince's Trust since March 2002. The mission of the Prince's Trust is to help people who would not otherwise have the opportunity to succeed. These include young people marginalised through lack of qualifications, criminal convictions, exclusions or unemployment. The aim is to give these young people the self-confidence, motivation and resilience to overcome difficult circumstances.

By entering into partnership with the Prince's Trust Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has become a high performing delivery partner. Young socially excluded people from the Kirkdale, Anfield, Everton, Kensington, Vauxhall, Bootle, Litherland, and Crosby areas have completed the 12 week, full time courses. Four of these courses have now been completed.

As a result of the success of this partnership approach at the request of Prince's Trust, North West, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is expanding the programme into the South Liverpool and Knowsley areas.

### Vehicle Arson

Merseyside Fire Service in partnership with Safer Merseyside Partnership, held a conference in July 2003 to raise awareness of the relationship between abandoned vehicles and subsequent vehicle arson. The event has led to the commencement of partnership strategies to have abandoned vehicles removed from the community without delay.



Arson Task Force members are now attending Crime and Disorder Reduction Panels and initiatives are being progressed to address the issue of abandoned vehicles in each District.

### Arson Attacks on the Home

In 2001/2002 Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service responded to 1065 arson dwelling fires, for the year 2002/2003 this figure has reduced to 937. Likewise for 2001/2002 Merseyside Fire Service attended 304 arson fires in multi-occupied houses, this figure has reduced to 130 for 2002/2003. Whilst we are encouraged by this downward trend, we must not become complacent. Our work must continue to ensure that we see yet further reductions.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service supports projects such as "Alleygating", which can help to reduce the build up of rubbish and thus prevent incidences of rubbish fires. This was an initiative emanating from partnership working within The Safer Merseyside Partnership.

In September 2002 Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service appointed 3 Bi-lingual fire safety advocates, to assist in engaging minority communities because of language, cultural and religious barriers. The team are developing a reporting scheme whereby non-English speaking residents can contact the advocates to report incidences of abandoned vehicles, unsecured property, fly tipping, and accumulations of rubbish. The advocates will then progress these issues on their behalf and thus reduce the likelihood of the potential arson in these communities and areas of Liverpool.

### Arson Attacks on Schools

Schools within Merseyside are already recognised as vulnerable to arson. In partnership with the responsible person joint arson risk assessments will be carried out. In conjunction with local key partners, intervention measures will be formulated for such schools.

In tandem with these measures, Merseyside is actively promoting the installation of sprinklers within schools, particularly "new build" premises. Good housekeeping as detailed in the following "Preventative Measures" section are encouraged at all schools and can be easily managed at local level, at low cost.

### Arson Attacks on Places of Worship

In June 2002, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, in partnership with Merseyside Police, Church-Watch and Merseyside Fire Liaison Panel hosted a seminar at the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral. The aim was to raise awareness in the faith community of fires/crimes that occur in places of worship and put in place measures to counter the risks. The outcome was to launch a "Burning Faith" roadshow, which is now being delivered to audiences at various meeting rooms in the region.

## Arson in Commerce and Industry

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service have Fire Safety Inspectors based in locations covering each of the five metropolitan districts within Merseyside. In addition to working with Local Authority Building Control Officers at the planning stage, they work direct with building owners/managers to progress the aim of combating arson at the planning and risk assessment stages.

### Preventative measures

Reducing the likelihood of arson is often a matter of common sense. Listed below are a number of steps to assist individuals in preventing their property being subjected to an arson fire. These basic steps apply to all property including, homes, businesses and, where appropriate, vehicles.

- Ensure property is secure with adequate locks on doors and windows and the provision of security lighting;
- Ensure common areas such as bin stores have satisfactory security and are well lit;
- Minimise the amount of combustible materials left in and around buildings;
- Consider setting up a neighbourhood watch scheme;
- Ensure basic home fire safety measures are in place, such as fitting smoke alarms, keeping matches in a safe place and having an escape plan in the event of a fire;
- Park vehicles in a well lit place;
- Fit an anti-theft device;
- Hiding valuable property kept in the car from view.

For people who may be at greater risk, perhaps because of previous attacks or because of occupancy type/area there are additional measures that can be considered:

- Fit external mailbox or 'petrol proof' mail box on door;
- Fit smoke alarms in specific areas such as hallway by front door;
- Fit security grills and enhanced security measures such as CCTV; or
- Fit a sprinkler system. (Residential sprinkler systems are also available)

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

The vision and mission of Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority reflect the Government's vision for a fire and rescue service that reduces risks and incidents of arson in communities.

- **Vision statement**

To make Merseyside a safer community:

- **Mission statement**

We will work in partnership with the community to provide a value for money service which will:

- Reduce death, injury and loss of property due to fire and protect the people and the environment, including visitors to the region;

- **Aims**

To contribute to the corporate aims we will:

- Reduce the number of fires and other emergencies;
- Reduce the impact of fire and other emergencies on individuals, communities, the environment and the Merseyside economy.



- **Objectives**

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service will;

- Reduce the risk from fire in domestic properties.
- Target those most vulnerable to fire;
- Prevent, deter, detect, divert and prosecute arsonists;



- Target properties most at risk from deliberate fires;
- Be a positive role model within local communities;
- Enforce fire safety laws to improve public safety.

- **Specific Actions Relating to Arson**

- Through Home Fire Risk Assessments take additional action in properties at risk from arson;
- Play an active role in the various partnerships aimed at reducing levels of crime, including arson, within Merseyside;
- Develop a pan-Merseyside approach to reduce the risk from abandoned vehicles;
- Develop a pan-Merseyside approach to the boarding up of unoccupied properties and removal of combustible material;
- Develop the partnership with Police colleagues on a Merseyside basis to create a Fire/Police Arson and Fire Investigation protocol. Develop partnership working at Headquarters and area level to devise common recording levels.
- Work closely with Police colleagues on an area and Merseyside basis to predict patterns of arson, investigate them professionally and seek successful prosecutions where appropriate;
- Identify those properties most vulnerable to an arson attack and with the responsible person carry out a joint arson risk assessment;

- Develop partnership working with local Neighbourhood Warden Teams, to identify potential arson targets within their local community;
- Seek funding from Government and elsewhere to support the Authority arson reduction strategies;
- Work with other youth agencies/bodies to influence young people on the dangers of arson. These include Youth Offending Teams, Youth Inclusion Programmes, The Prince's Trust Volunteers and referrals from the judicial system;
- Build on Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service active involvement at district level on Crime and Disorder Reduction Panels and strengthen the remit at the Merseyside Arson Task Force. In the first instance this will include the employment of "Arson Interventionists" to work at district level reducing incidence of arson.

#### Measures and Targets

- To reduce the number of deliberate fires.
  - Merseyside Fire Service will adopt the Governments Arson Reduction Target to reduce by 10% the number of deliberate fires by 31st March 2010 from the baseline figure of 2001/02.
- The total number of calls to fires attended per 10,000 population.
  - To continue the reduction. Specifically the target for 2003/04 is 156.8, compared to 184.6 in 2002/03.
- The number of property and vehicle fires per 10,000 population.
  - To reduce the trend. Specifically the target for 2003/04 is 57.0, compared to 60.1 in 2002/03.
- Improve the working relationship with Merseyside Police. Develop a Fire/Police Arson and Fire Investigation Protocol by December 2003.
- Work with young people at risk of social exclusion.
  - Continue to develop and deliver the youth programmes designed to develop self esteem and community awareness;
- Offer those schools most vulnerable to an arson attack a specific arson risk assessment.





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