

# **\$1,000 REWARD SET: Alton Fire Department seeks info in recent arson investigations**

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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ALTON - Alton Fire Chief Bernie Sebold sent out a release on Monday that the City of Alton has several fires that are open cases and remain under investigation for arson. He asked for any assistance the public could offer in these various cases.

Sebold also said Alton Mayor Brant Walker stands behind the Alton Fire Department and is offering a standing \$1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of a person that has committed the act of arson.

"Since just before the first of the year, the City of Alton has had several fires that are open cases and remain under investigation for arson," Sebold said. "After fires are extinguished, the fire department performs origin and cause investigation to determine where and how the fire has started. If this investigation reveals that the fire is believed to be an intentional act, then the Alton Fire Department, Alton Police Department and Office of the State Fire Marshal collaborate on the investigation for arson. Arson is a crime.

"Arson is a crime that can negatively impact a whole community. The act of arson not only damages one's property, but also creates worry in the residents of the impacted neighborhood. In an effort to curb the act of arson and create a safer city for our residents.

"Often due to the intensity of the fire, physical evidence is limited and we rely heavily on the assistance of the public that may have witnessed someone at the scene or heard someone talking about their involvement in setting the fire combating this crime. We are asking the residents of the City of Alton to assist us."

Sebold closed by saying: "If municipalities are to effectively address arson crimes in a community, every citizen must participate in these investigations by providing information to:

The **Alton Police Department** on its Tip Line at 618-465-5948

Or the **State Fire Marshal Arson Hotline** at 1-800-252-2947

This defines the statutes of arson:

## **720 ILCS 5/Article 20 Arson**

**Section 20-1.** Arson; residential arson; place of worship arson.

A person commits arson when, by means of fire or explosive, he or she knowingly:

(1) Damages any real property, or any personal property having a value of \$150 or more, of another without his or her consent; or

(2) With intent to defraud an insurer, damages any property or any personal property having a value of \$150 or more. Arson is a Class 2

felony. Residential arson or place of worship arson is a Class 1 felony

#### Section 20-1.1 Aggravated Arson

(a) A person commits aggravated arson when in the course of committing arson he or she knowingly damages, partially or totally, any building or structure, including any adjacent building or structure, including all or any part of a school building, house trailer, watercraft, motor vehicle, or railroad car, and (1) he knows or reasonably should know that one or more persons are present therein or (2) any person suffers great bodily harm, or permanent disability or disfigurement as a result of the fire or explosion or (3) a fireman, policeman, or correctional officer who is present at the scene acting in the line of duty is injured as a result of the fire or explosion. For purposes of this Section, property "of another" means a building or other property, whether real or personal, in which a person other than the offender has an interest that the offender has no authority to defeat or impair, even though the offender may also have an interest in the building or property; and "school building" means any public or private preschool, elementary or secondary school, community college, college, or university.

(b) Sentence. Aggravated arson is a Class X felony

Source: [www.ilga.gov](http://www.ilga.gov)

#### **National facts about arson:**

Approximately 210,300 fires are intentionally set each year. These fires represent 13 percent of all fires reported to fire departments.

Intentionally set fires result in approximately 375 deaths, 1,300 injuries, and \$1 billion in direct property loss annually.

The incidence of intentionally set fires peak in the spring (March and April) and again in mid-summer (July).

Matches (30 percent) and lighters (15 percent) are the leading heat sources of intentionally set fires.

Fifty-seven percent of intentionally set fires occur in outside areas. Twenty-two percent of fires occur in open, outside areas including fields and farmland. Twenty percent of intentionally set fires occur in other, unspecified outside areas.

Approximately 22 percent of intentionally set fires occur in structures.

Light vegetation including grass (26 percent) and rubbish, trash, and waste (11

percent) are the items most often first ignited in intentionally set fires.

Source: United States Fire Administration Topical Fire Report Series, Intentional Set Fires, Volume 9, Issue5/November 2000