



Fire Watch

Los Angeles Fire Department Newsletter

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Los Angeles Fire Department
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Our Mission

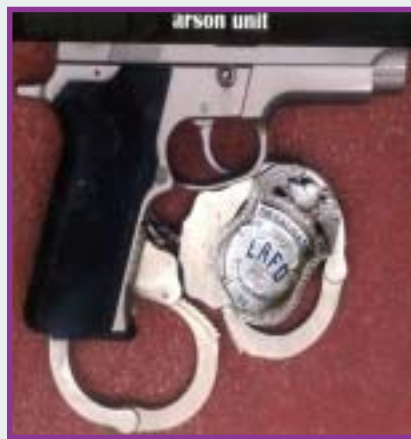
“To preserve life and property, promote public safety, foster economic growth through leadership, management and actions, as an all-risk fire and life safety response provider.”

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LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT ARSON/COUNTER-TERRORISM SECTION



The Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section was originally formed as the Arson Bureau in 1918 by then Chief Engineer Archibald J. Eley. When fire prevention efforts and responsibilities increased, Chief Eley made the Arson Bureau part of The Fire Prevention Bureau. Lieutenant Eugene H. Enos, a firefighter recovering from injuries, was appointed as the first arson investigator. On January 18, 1918, the Fire Commission approved his appointment. Assisting him was a police detective.

During the Arson Bureau's first years, 125 fires classified as unknown origin were investigated and 29 of them were found to be incendiary. Arrests and convictions resulted in nearly every case. Unlike most large city departments during the Depression, the LAFD escaped widespread incendiary fires set by professional arsonists hired by business owners in financial trouble. A major explanation lies in the effectiveness of the Arson Bureau, which earned a national reputation for its scientific investigation techniques. With photographs from the bureau of photography and the assistance of police chemists and laboratory technicians, professional torches as well as amateur arsonists were deterred.

Notable, however, was the mysterious explosion and fire that stopped clocks at 7:20 a.m., October 17, 1930, in the 12-story Garment Building at 217 East Eighth Street. Hundreds of windows for many blocks around were shattered. Even as the last of 48 burned and lacerated workers were being taken to hospitals, arson investigators, (aided by photographers and the police), began looking for the cause. An arson investigator theorized that a combination of “natural gas and gasoline, set off by an



CHIEF ARCHIE J. ELEY
CHIEF ENGINEER 1910



electrical contrivance," caused the \$1 million explosion and fire. It was then the worst downtown explosion in the City's history.

By 1978, arson had become the fastest-growing crime in the United States. The reasons for the phenomenon were as complex as they were varied. Most law enforcement agencies put a low priority on incendiary fires, unless death or serious injuries resulted. Arson is, moreover, a unique crime to prove to the point where convictions are

possible or successful. Given the high incidence of fires of suspicious nature and the less than two dozen arson investigators in the LAFD at the time, the problem was then acute. The prevailing opinion that all fire losses, even if incendiary in cause, were covered by insurance.

On October 5, 1978, Mayor Bradley, at the suggestion of then Chief Engineer John C. Gerard, appointed an Arson Suppression Task Force. One of the first major activities of the Arson Task Force was the

development of a public awareness program by a committee headed by Paul Ditzel, a newspaper reporter.



Captain Patrick McGuinness, Commander of the LAFD Arson Section and Mr. Ditzel worked



with telephone officials in establishing California's first statewide toll-free arson tipster hotline. The hotline went into service on July 13, 1980. Presently, the hotline can be contacted at (800) 633-2836.

The fire that took the life of Firefighter Lynn R. Hazlett of Squad 39 on May 12, 1979, resulted in the first joint investigative efforts by the LAFD's Arson Section, the Arson Task Force of the U.S. Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the LAPD. Investigators believed a professional arsonist was hired to do the job but was never caught. However, a different outcome occurred in the Cugee's Restaurant fire, which took the life of Apparatus Operator Thomas G. Taylor on January 28, 1981. A joint task force effort between LAFD and ATF investigators, with the help of over 100 firefighters and police, sifted through the debris following the tragic event. The investigative work of the joint task force and especially

Investigator Gary Cooper gathered enough evidence to successfully prosecute Mario Catanio for the murder of A/O Taylor. Investigator Cooper's extraordinary work earned him a commendation from U.S. Attorney Stephen S. Trott.

The current Los Angeles Fire Department Arson

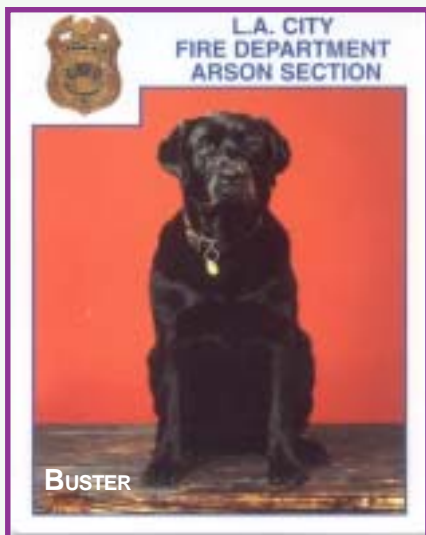
Investigation Section shares the responsibility of fire investigation with the Bureau of Emergency Services. This responsibility is granted under authority of the Los Angeles City Charter. The Arson Section is currently comprised of



21 uniformed members and 4 civilian members.

All special-duty arson investigators share on-call duty responsibilities. The on-call investigators augment the platoon-duty investigators at scenes involving fire fatalities, House of Worship fires, and all fire-related domestic terrorist incidents.

The newest member to join the Arson Investigation Section rank is "Buster", an accelerant detection canine, who was trained by the



Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). Buster and his handler (Investigator Frank Oglesby) are on call 24 hours a day. The team has assisted local and federal agencies throughout the country as members of the National Response Team. The Accelerant Detective K-9 Program has successfully aided in the prosecution of suspects in several significant fires. Busters keen senses have many times outperformed modern day technical equipment.

The Arson Investigation Section is currently participating in three arson task forces. The LAFD/ATF Arson Task Force has been in effect since November 1, 1984. This Task Force was formed to combat arson fires related to insurance fraud, organized

crime, and serial arson. One example of the cases investigated by this task force involved one of the most prolific serial arsonists in United States history, John Orr, a Glendale Fire Department Captain. This individual was identified, investigated, arrested, and successfully prosecuted by the LAFD/ATF Arson Task Force.

The Los Angeles House of Worship Arson Task Force was formed in June 1996, by then-Battalion Chief Terrance Manning. This Task Force is comprised of members from the LAFD Arson Investigation Section, LAPD Criminal Conspiracy Section, ATF, and FBI. The Task Force investigates all arson and hate-related fires that occur to a house of worship within the City of Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles Arson Terrorism Work Group is the latest task force the Arson Investigation Section has been participating on along with the LAPD Anti-Terrorism Division, ATF and FBI. The Task Force was developed following the tragic September 11, 2001 attacks and investigates all arson incidents related



to homeland security, domestic terrorism, and eco-terrorism.

In addition to performing investigative duties, the Arson Investigation Section is responsible for processing and supplying Fire Reports to requesting parties. The Section receives approximately 500 requests for Fire Reports per month (at a nominal fee of \$5.50 a piece). The Arson Investigation Section is also the subpoena-processing center for the Fire Department. Approximately 250-400 subpoenas are processed monthly for Department members.

In 2004, the LAFD Arson Investigation Section expanded to include an active role in counter-





terrorism and tactical planning. The Section has now been designated as the Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section. The objective of these enhancements is to allow the Arson Investigation Section to effectively contribute to the LAFD's ability to reduce the impact of a local event on lives and on the local economy.

This expanded role has also created the new position of the Terrorism Liaison Officer (TLO). The objective of the TLO Program is to develop and maintain efficient channels of communication between local Health, Fire, and Police Departments and the Terrorism Early Warning Group (TEW) relative to terrorist threats and vulnerabilities.

Arson is the second leading cause of residential fire deaths and accounts for approximately 25 % of all fires in the United States. Violent crimes involving

arson claimed 700 lives last year. Arson is also the leading cause of dollar loss from fire, exceeding \$2 billion annually. There are approximately 500,000 arson fires that occur per year. Only 15% of arson cases are closed by arrest. Interestingly, juveniles accounted for 55% of arson arrests.



A UNIT 1 AND BUSTER IN ACTION

Training is a vital part of the job. The members of the Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section are required to qualify with their duty weapon as well as take advanced tactical training. The Los Angeles Police Department administers the training and qualifications. Arson investigators keep their skills up by attending several accredited courses every year.

With the number of arson fires increasing on an annual basis and the added responsibilities of the Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section, the Los Angeles Fire Department will continue to focus concentrated efforts aimed at combating this heinous crime.

Special thanks to the Arson/Counter-Terrorism Investigation Section. Additionally, special thanks to the Historical Society for making information easily accessible via the Intranet.

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