



It was an especially long New Year's Weekend for condominium and apartment building residents in Hollywood and West Hollywood. An arsonist was on the loose and few owners felt safe. Over 50 separate arson events occurred over a three-day period with many fires impacting cars parked in multi-family structures. With blazes erupting all over the Westside, taxing fire department resources, police officials recommended residents to take two very simple preventive measures: 1) Leave their porch and carport lights on and 2) Keep their eyes open.

According to Federal Investigators, these recent fire-setting incidents represented the worst crime spree in California since the 1992 race riots. On Tuesday morning, January 3, 2012, at approximately 3 AM, the

police arrested a suspect – an apparently disenfranchised 24-year old – angry over his mother's legal troubles. He had acted out by launching a three-night rampage, attacking cars parked in carports and parking garages. Shortly after the arrest, fire officials pegged the resulting damages at a whopping \$3 million.



Even with this suspect in custody, arson unfortunately remains a very common occurrence. According to the United States Fire Administration data, from 2004 to 2006 an estimated 210,300 intentionally set fires occurred each year

in the United States. Intentionally set fires account for 13 percent of fires responded to by fire departments across the nation.

There are steps Associations can take to make them less vulnerable to an arsonist:



Evaluate the quality of the lighting in your Association's Common Areas – with special attention to garage/carport exteriors, driveways and pathways. Good lighting will make it easier to detect unauthorized visitors.



Trim back trees and bushes away from the structures. Dark portions of the premises can be attractive to would-be arsonists. Remove all excess vegetation that is capable of being ignited.



Check with your agent/broker to make certain there is sufficient building coverage – with special attention to appurtenant structures such as clubhouses, carports, garages, and any other commonly vacant, free-standing structures.



Ask your agent/broker about coverage for fire damage to trees, lawns, plants and shrubs.



Remove all possible sources of ignition from the garage/carport areas such as stored cardboard/newspapers, flammable liquids (including barbecue lighting fluids) and unused gas containers.



Remove abandoned cars and vehicles. The NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) has estimated an average of 25,328 intentional fires involved these types of vehicles. An abandoned car is a target for arson.



Secure vacant units which could become potential arson targets.



Encourage the fire department to conduct frequent fire code inspections.



Have your fire extinguishers, smoke detectors and fire sprinkler systems serviced annually.



Encourage members of your HOA to participate in a local Neighborhood Watch program. These active volunteers can help deter crime (including arson) by reporting license plates of suspicious vehicles and potential suspect descriptions. (If you don't have a Neighborhood Watch program already active in your community, contact the business line at your local police department or go to www.usaonwatch.org.)



By Timothy Cline, CIRMS

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