



Coffee Break Training - Fire Investigation Series

Arson Curriculum: Establishing a Community Arson Watch Program

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Learning Objective: The student shall be able to identify the five required steps to establish a Community Arson Watch program.

A neighborhood's arson problem can range from youngsters setting nuisance fires to a full blown crisis with a serial arsonist. Following the successful Neighborhood Watch five-step program model provides an effective groundwork.

Step 1

The first step is to analyze the specific local problem and collect related data. Strategies that address the problems in a given area must be mapped out. From the outset, it is essential that neighbors work together. This effort provides an opportunity for neighbors to meet and get to know each other, something that has become less common lately. It is crucial to include neighborhood involvement for the process to be successful. In addition to not being familiar with your neighbors, the dilemma is compounded by the fact that many adults in these neighborhoods work multiple jobs frequently with odd hours, making it extraordinarily difficult to schedule meetings and organize events.

Step 2

Once the neighbors have a connection, the second step involves building a partnership between fire and emergency services, the police and other law enforcement agencies, and the residents. This is often the most difficult step to hurdle because there is usually angst between the residents and law enforcement for the existing crime problem that exists in their community.

Step 3

The third step is to assess the needs of a given neighborhood and in the case of arson, how the fire and police departments can work with the residents. Neighborhood Watch states, "In many cases, law enforcement and community members do not have the same focus. An effective Neighborhood Arson Watch program will combine the needs of the fire and police departments with those of the neighborhood when determining which problems to focus on and the methods used to address them.

Step 4

The penultimate step in setting up a Neighborhood Watch program is choosing and training a dynamic group of volunteers that are led by organized and motivated leaders. If the group leaders are devoid of motivation and organization, the volunteers may be uninspired to participate and quickly quit out of disappointment and frustration.

Step 5

The fifth and final step is to develop meaningful projects specific to the identified problem. Often, after a Neighborhood Watch has addressed its original issue, members lose interest. It is important for leaders to remain passionate. One way to accomplish this is to design new projects so that there is always a goal towards which the team of volunteers is aspiring.

For more information regarding the U.S. Fire Administration's Arson Awareness Week, go to www.usfa.fema.gov/aaw

