

Arson intelligence newsletter

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European Exchange of Best Practice in Arson Prevention and Investigation Northumberland Arson Task Force

In 2006, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) successfully secured a grant from the European Commission Directorate-General for the Environment under the 2006 Call for Papers in Civil Protection (Grant Number: 07.0300601/2006/448114/SUB/A3).¹ This substantial grant funds a two-year project (January 2007 to December 2008) aimed at identifying, collating and disseminating best practice in arson prevention and investigation across 33 European Countries.² The title of the project is: "European Exchange of Best Practice in Arson Prevention and Investigation".

The Northumberland Arson Task Force (ATF), including officers from Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service and Northumbria Police, are currently delivering this project in partnership with Laboratoire Central de la Prefecture de Police in Paris, France. This article provides a brief summary of the key activities that will be undertaken on the project.

NORTHUMBERLAND
COUNTY COUNCIL



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¹ The responsibility for the content of this article remains entirely with the author. The European Commission is not responsible for its content or any use made of the information contained therein.

² The countries included in this project include: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom.

The need for exchanging best practice throughout Europe

The need for European information-exchange networks on fire-related issues was initially identified during a workshop hosted by the Swedish Rescue Services Agency in Revinge, Sweden in 2005. During this workshop, delegates from several European countries identified the need for greater cross-border communication, cooperation and collaboration on fire-related issues. In response to this workshop, this project aims to develop greater cross-border and cross-agency communication between arson practitioners working for fire, police, forensic, forestry and government organisations across Europe. By stimulating greater levels of cooperation and communication, the project will help these organisations to reduce the number and severity of incidents of deliberate fire setting across Europe.

In order to collect, collate and disseminate arson prevention and investigation best practice, the project partners are undertaking several key activities. These include:

1. Development of an extensive European network of contacts.
2. Distribution of short questionnaire surveys.
3. Construction of a European database of best practice.
4. Construction of a European register of experts/specialists.
5. Development of universal basic level fire investigation training modules.
6. Delivery of a two-day international conference in the North East of England on the 15th and 16th September 2008: "Fire Crime In Europe: A European Conference on Exchanging Best Practice in Arson Prevention and Investigation"

These activities will now be discussed individually in more detail.

1. Development of a European network of contacts

367 individuals from over 250 organisations are currently receiving regular updates about the project. The project distribution list will continue to grow and the project partners hope that at least 380 individuals from across Europe will have been involved in the project in some capacity by December 2008.

2. Distribution of short questionnaire surveys

Between June and December 2007, 279 short questionnaires were distributed to arson practitioners working across Europe. The key aim of these questionnaires was to extract basic information about the procedures and arrangements for arson prevention and investigation. 152 individuals working for police and fire organisations, and 38 individuals working for forensic organisations, have completed and returned copies of the questionnaire. This equates to return rates of 63% from police and fire organisations and 81% from forensic organisations respectively. The data contained within the questionnaires is currently being analysed and a short summary report will soon be written.

3. A register of experts/specialists in arson prevention and investigation

The project team is currently collecting contact details of individuals willing to appear on a European register of experts/specialists in arson prevention and arson investigation. Individuals included in this register are experts in arson investigation and/or arson prevention and are willing to complete exchanges and placements with professionals working in other European countries. The register will allow practitioners in each European country to locate experts/specialists in each European country who may be able to provide knowledge, expertise and experience that might provide benefits to current arson prevention and investigation practices and procedures.

A number of individuals from several countries have already agreed to appear on the register; however, the project team still encourage other individuals to express their interest. The current aim is to enlist at least one expert/specialist from each of the 33 European countries that form the focus of the project by December 2008.

4. A database for best practice in arson prevention and investigation

Another key activity currently being undertaken by the project team is the development of a database of best practice in arson prevention and investigation. This database will include best

practice information from across Europe, enhancing current levels of communication between arson practitioners working in European countries. Some case studies and policies have already been submitted for inclusion in the database; however, the project officer will continue to collect best practice until at least December 2008.

Both the best practice database and register of experts/specialists will initially be stored on a stand alone computer database held at Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters. Practitioners involved in arson prevention and investigation will, later this year, be able to request information and contact details from the database and register. In the near future it is hoped that this system will be made securely accessible via the internet so that arson professionals across Europe can access both resources from their own computer terminals. The project team is currently researching practical options and potential funding streams to assist in the implementation of this web-based system.

5. Development of universal basic fire investigation training modules

A model for basic level courses in fire investigation has been developed by officers from the Northumberland Arson Task Force, the State Fire Service College in Pozna_ and the Pozna_ Police. The course model incorporates the knowledge, expertise, and experience of arson practitioners from two different countries and from two distinct types of organisation.

The first fire investigation training course to adopt the basic model was delivered in Pozna_ in September 2007. The Pozna_ training course was a particularly important event for two key reasons:

1. It was reportedly the first time that multiple agencies in Poland had come together to deliver and receive training in fire investigation.
2. The training course was designed and delivered using the expertise, knowledge and experience of individuals from different organisations working in different countries. This project aims to stimulate other similar initiatives in the near future.

By completing more thorough and rigorous investigations of fires that occur, the fire, police and insurance agencies in the Pozna_ region are now better equipped to apprehend individuals responsible for arson fires and, consequently, reduce the number of arson fires that are set within the region. The basic course model used in Pozna_ may provide a suitable foundation for the delivery of similar basic level courses in other European countries.

6. Delivering the "Fire Crime in Europe" Conference on 15th and 16th September 2008

The project partners will present the findings of the project activities at a European conference to be held in the North East of England on the 15th and 16th September 2008. The conference will aim to raise a European-wide awareness of different arson prevention and investigation best practice initiatives, policies and procedures. Individuals from all 33 European countries that form the focus of the project will be invited to attend the event as delegates and speakers. A call for papers and delegates will be circulated soon through the project distribution list.

This event will provide an excellent opportunity for discussion and dialogue between practitioners working in European countries. The project partners also hope that the conference will raise support for the creation and maintenance of a formal and active European network of arson prevention and investigation specialists. A formal European network will ultimately be the most efficient mechanism for maintaining communication between arson practitioners after the life of the project.

If you have any queries concerning this project and/or you would like to receive further information and/or contribute, please contact the Arson Task Force Project Officer at: Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Loansdean, Morpeth, NE61 2ED. Or email: rstacey@northumberland.gov.uk

Arson Prevention for Small Businesses

Stop your business becoming an arson statistic.

The most common cause of fire in shops and retail premises is arson. There is a lot that business owners can do to protect themselves through low cost housekeeping.

Each year there are over 3,000 arson attacks on shops, cafés and small businesses.¹

It is estimated that up to 80% of businesses are seriously affected following a major fire.² You can help prevent your business becoming one of these statistics with a few simple precautions.

How safe are you?

This checklist will help reduce chances of suffering an arson attack:

- Limit the number of entrances in use – but do not lock fire exits!
- Keep a watch on what is going on. Larger businesses may consider having a security guard at main entrances. In smaller shops and businesses you and your staff should be vigilant.
- If you are based in a mall or on an industrial or retail park, talk to the security manager of the whole site. Make sure the site is secured at night and report any signs that it is not.

- Ensure that doors and windows are in good repair and that locks are working.
- Gaps under doors to the street should be as narrow as possible to stop lighted paper or fuel being pushed under them.
- Letterboxes should have a metal container fitted on the inside to contain any fires from lighted rags, paper or fireworks.
- Keep a list of people holding keys. Chase up any that are missing.
- Identify entry routes for intruders – via yards, drain pipes, flat roofs, what can you do to prevent such access?
- Special danger areas include storage and warehousing. Make it a rule that access is only available to authorised members of staff.

To order copies of the Arson Prevention Farms and the Small Business leaflet please contact Xenia Selekou on 020 7216 7522 or email xenia.Selekou@abi.org.uk

¹ UK Fire Statistics 2003, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005)

² London Chambers of Commerce statistic, 2003

Conferences coming up.....

If you would like to post your event please contact:

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