



NATIONAL CHURCH ARSON TASK FORCE



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THIRD YEAR REPORT FOR THE PRESIDENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 1996, federal officials detected a sharp rise in the number of reported attacks on our Nation's houses of worship, especially African American churches in the South. In response to this trend, President Clinton directed the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Treasury to form the National Church Arson Task Force (NCATF or Task Force) in June 1996 and made the investigation of these fires and the swift prosecution of the arsonists a top priority of federal law enforcement. The President called on all Americans to come together in a spirit of respect and reconciliation to help victimized congregations rebuild and to heal tensions in affected communities.

The President directed his Administration to implement a three-pronged strategy: identify and prosecute the arsonists; help communities rebuild the burned houses of worship; and offer assistance in preventing more fires. Working in partnership with state and local law enforcement and community and private groups, federal officials have continued to achieve considerable success in carrying out the President's mission and strategy.

The success of the President's strategy is clear and measurable. We are pleased to report that the number of church arsons continues on a downward trend. We believe this is due to increased vigilance, well-publicized arrests and prosecutions, and enhanced prevention strategies.

Yet, even as victimized churches are rebuilt and the number of fires declines, reports of new fires continue. We must remain vigilant. We must work to heal tensions in affected communities and to rebuild affected houses of worship. We must not let those who espouse hate prevail. Accordingly, we continue aggressively to investigate these fires and prosecute those arrested. The following presents highlights of the report.

Prosecutions

- 827 Incident Investigations - The NCATF has opened investigations into 827 arsons, bombings or attempted bombings that have occurred at houses of worship between January 1, 1995 and October 5, 1999.

- 364 Arrests - Federal, state, and local authorities have arrested 364 suspects in connection with 294 of the 827 incidents.
- 35.6% Arrest Rate - The 35.6% rate of arrest in NCATF arson cases is more than double the 16% rate of arson arrests nationwide.
- 287 Convictions - Between January 1, 1995 and October 5, 1999, federal and state prosecutors successfully obtained convictions of 287 defendants in connection with 206 incidents. Most of the incidents involved arsons at houses of worship, but some involved the use of firearms, bombs or violent threats against houses of worship.

Rebuilding

- The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) continues to work in partnership with the National Council of Churches and the Congress of National Black Churches to provide assistance to congregations in their rebuilding efforts.
- HUD administers the \$10 million Federal Loan Guarantee Fund, which was established by Congress as part of the 1996 Church Arson Prevention Act to assist the rebuilding effort. Approximately \$3.8 million in loan guarantee commitments were made as of October 5, 1999.
- HUD, with participation from the Departments of Treasury and Justice, convened a conference with senior-level officials of some of the Nation's largest financial institutions and other Washington-area lenders. The conference was designed to enlist participation in making loans to restore places of worship. HUD understands the importance of maintaining this special partnership and is acting on a number of recommendations made by the financial institution representatives regarding lending operations and the loan guarantee process.

Prevention

- The National Arson Prevention Initiative (the Initiative) continues to create coalitions and provide communities with the tools and technical assistance necessary to battle arson. The Initiative issued \$225,000 in arson prevention grants to 14 cities in Fiscal Year 1998 and \$125,000 to eight cities in Fiscal Year 1999.
- The National Arson Prevention Clearinghouse (the Clearinghouse) was established to provide public education materials and coordinate technical assistance requests from communities. Accessible by a toll-free number (1-888-603-3100), the Clearinghouse has reached over three million individuals, organizations, and communities with arson awareness and prevention materials since its inception in 1996.
- The primary focus of the Initiative is to develop arson prevention awareness at places of worship. The Initiative, however, also focuses on juvenile firesetting. These efforts complement the programs of the United States Fire Administration (USFA), which has been combating this problem since the 1970's.

- NCATF data indicate that many church arsons are set by juveniles. During Arson Awareness Week in 1999, the Initiative sponsored a seminar entitled “Community Awareness: Child Firesetting and Juvenile Arson.” The seminar generated community awareness about the role of fire service, law enforcement, and education personnel and emphasized the seriousness and magnitude of the child firesetting and juvenile arson problem that exists nationally and locally.

Reconciliation

- The Community Relations Service (CRS) plays a key role in the work of the Task Force. CRS continues to provide conflict prevention and resolution assistance to local officials, law enforcement authorities, clergy, and other leaders in some 17 states across the country.
- In December 1998, CRS participated with other members of the NCATF, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, in a three-day National Church Burning Status Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.
- CRS remains committed to dispatching conflict resolution and reconciliation experts from its regional offices to work directly with local communities to promote multiracial cooperation in the construction of houses of worship, and to provide technical assistance in ways that bring together law enforcement agencies and minority neighborhoods.

OVERVIEW

In this third year, the NCATF concentrated its resources on identifying and prosecuting suspected arsonists, rebuilding damaged or destroyed houses of worship, preventing future damage and destruction, and coordinating reconciliation in affected communities. Outlined in this report are the results of the past year.

A PERMANENT PRIORITY

In June 1996, President Clinton established the NCATF to coordinate the efforts of federal, state, and local law enforcement in response to a sharp increase in reports of attacks on churches, particularly African American churches in the South. Attorney General Janet Reno promptly directed all 94 U.S. Attorneys to establish or expand local task forces focusing on arsons at houses of worship in their districts. These local task forces brought together state and local law enforcement, fire prevention officials, special agents of ATF and the FBI, mediators from the CRS, and victim/witness coordinators.

Congress also supported the efforts of the Task Force by strengthening federal laws. At the time of the formation of the Task Force, federal prosecutors often relied on general anti-arson statutes, such as the Anti-Arson Act of 1982, to prosecute those who used fire to destroy property involved in interstate commerce (18 U.S.C. § 844(i)). Under criminal civil rights statutes, they also had the authority to prosecute those who conspired to deprive persons of their civil rights or desecrated religious property or a house of worship under 18 U.S.C. §§ 241 and 247. On July 3, 1996, President Clinton signed the Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996, which granted federal prosecutors greater power in pursuing those who burn and desecrate houses of worship.

The NCATF has ensured that the investigation and prosecution of attacks on houses of worship remains a permanent priority within the Federal government, and that the innovative and highly successful practices of the NCATF Operations Team become a regular part of federal law enforcement efforts. The NCATF Operations Team established protocols and guidelines for the joint investigation and prosecution of suspected arsonists. The protocols and best practices developed by the Operations Team remain in force as the Task Force has integrated its work into the existing structures of the Civil Rights Division, the United States Attorneys' offices, ATF, and the FBI.

For the NCATF, best practices include the use of an array of law enforcement tools. For instance, the databases and computer systems of ATF and the FBI are used to track and analyze evidence and to generate investigative leads. A nationwide investigative lead database maintained by ATF helps identify, sort, and track information from selected church arsons. The Geographic Information System's computer technology also is used as an investigative tool to identify trends and patterns in tabular data through the use of maps. Investigators look to see whether unsolved crimes against houses of worship are related to solved crimes that have been committed at a nearby religious institution that is located across a jurisdictional boundary, such as a county or state border.

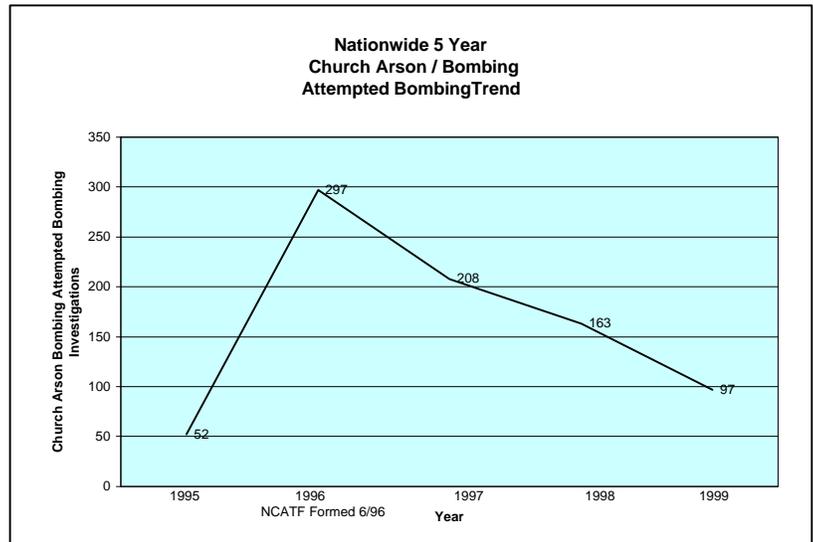
As reported last year, the NCATF took action to ensure that prosecutions of attacks on houses of worship continue as a permanent priority. To this end, the Task Force lodged the responsibility for federal prosecution of church arsons and bombings motivated by race or religion in the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division, the existing structure within the Justice Department that has jurisdiction over these and other federal criminal civil rights cases.

Progress To Date

Investigations

We are pleased to report, once again this year, that the number of church arsons has declined. We believe that this is due to more focused investigative efforts, well-publicized arrests and prosecutions, and an enhanced prevention strategy.

Notwithstanding these results, we must remain vigilant. Arsons at our Nation's houses of worship continue to occur. We continue aggressively to investigate these fires and prosecute those arrested.



As of October 5, 1999, the NCATF has opened investigations into 827 arsons, bombings, or attempted bombings that have occurred at houses of worship since January 1, 1995. (See Appendix 1, Charts A, Q, R, and S reflecting the number of church arsons, bombings, and attempted bombings nationwide; see Charts T, U, and V reflecting the number of church arsons, bombings, and attempted bombings in the South). In addition to those investigations, federal and state law enforcement and fire officials have responded to 403 fires that were determined to be caused accidentally and to 173 fires for which the cause remains undetermined.

Of the 827 incidents that the NCATF investigated, 269 have involved African American churches, 185 of which are located in the southern United States (See Appendix 1, Chart A reflecting total house of worship arsons and bombings; see Appendix 1, Charts G-P for a list of church fire investigations throughout the United States).

Arrests

Partnership among law enforcement agencies has produced a significant number of state and federal arrests. Between January 1, 1995, and October 5, 1999, federal, state, and local authorities arrested 364 defendants in connection with 294 of the 827 incidents that the Task Force has investigated. The 35.6% arrest rate is more than double the general arrest rate for arsons, which is approximately 16%, according to Justice Department statistics (See Appendix 1, Chart B).

Of the 364 persons arrested, 301 are Caucasian, 55 are African American, and eight are Hispanic. Juvenile arrests numbered 144. Of the 119 suspects arrested for arsons at African American churches, 75 are Caucasian, 43 are African American, and one is Hispanic. Of the 240 suspects arrested for arsons at non-African American houses of worship, 221 are Caucasian, 12 are African American, and seven are Hispanic. Five Caucasian suspects were arrested for arsons

at both African American and non-African American churches (See Appendix 1, Charts C-F and W-Y). As of October 5, 1999, there were 516 open investigations in which arrests have not yet been made. Since January 1, 1995, there have been 17 investigations solved with no arrests. (Investigations may be considered solved without arrest when, for example, the child is too young to prosecute or the church refuses to press charges.)

On April 20, 1999, the United States returned two indictments charging Jay Scott Ballinger with a series of church arsons. One indictment, returned in the Southern District of Indiana, charged Ballinger with seven church arsons. The second, filed in the Northern District of Georgia, alleged that Ballinger was responsible for three arsons. One of the Georgia fires led to the death of a volunteer firefighter.

After additional investigation, Ballinger was charged with two fires in the Middle District of Georgia on May 20, 1999 and the Indiana indictment was superceded on July 27, 1999 to include a conspiracy to commit arson at 29 churches in eight states – 14 in Indiana, five in Georgia, two in Ohio, four in Kentucky, and one each in California, Missouri, South Carolina and Tennessee. Many of the fires alleged to have been committed in furtherance of the conspiracy have also been charged by the United States as separate crimes of arson in the jurisdictions where those fires occurred. The Ballinger indictments represent the largest number of fires linked to a single defendant during the life of the Task Force.

Ballinger was arrested in February 1999, after being interviewed by agents investigating a rash of fires in southern Indiana, and remains in federal custody. If convicted on all charges, Ballinger faces a minimum imprisonment term of 90 years. Trial has been set for February 2000 in the Southern District of Indiana. No trial date is currently scheduled in either district on the Georgia charges.

Federal authorities have charged two other persons in relation to several Indiana fires. Donald Puckett pleaded guilty to one count of arson and was sentenced on September 30, 1999 to 27 months in prison. On November 9, 1999, Angela Wood pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit church arson and the commission of multiple church fires in connection with arsons at five churches within the Southern District of Indiana. The evidence at the plea hearing showed that Wood traveled from state to state with Jay Scott Ballinger seeking churches to burn. No sentencing date has been scheduled for Wood.

These arrests and charges would not have been possible without the tireless efforts and cooperation of many state, local and federal agents, prosecutors and officers.

As in all cases at this stage, the charges are only an allegation of guilt and are not proof of any crime. The defendant is presumed innocent and retains that presumption unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Convictions

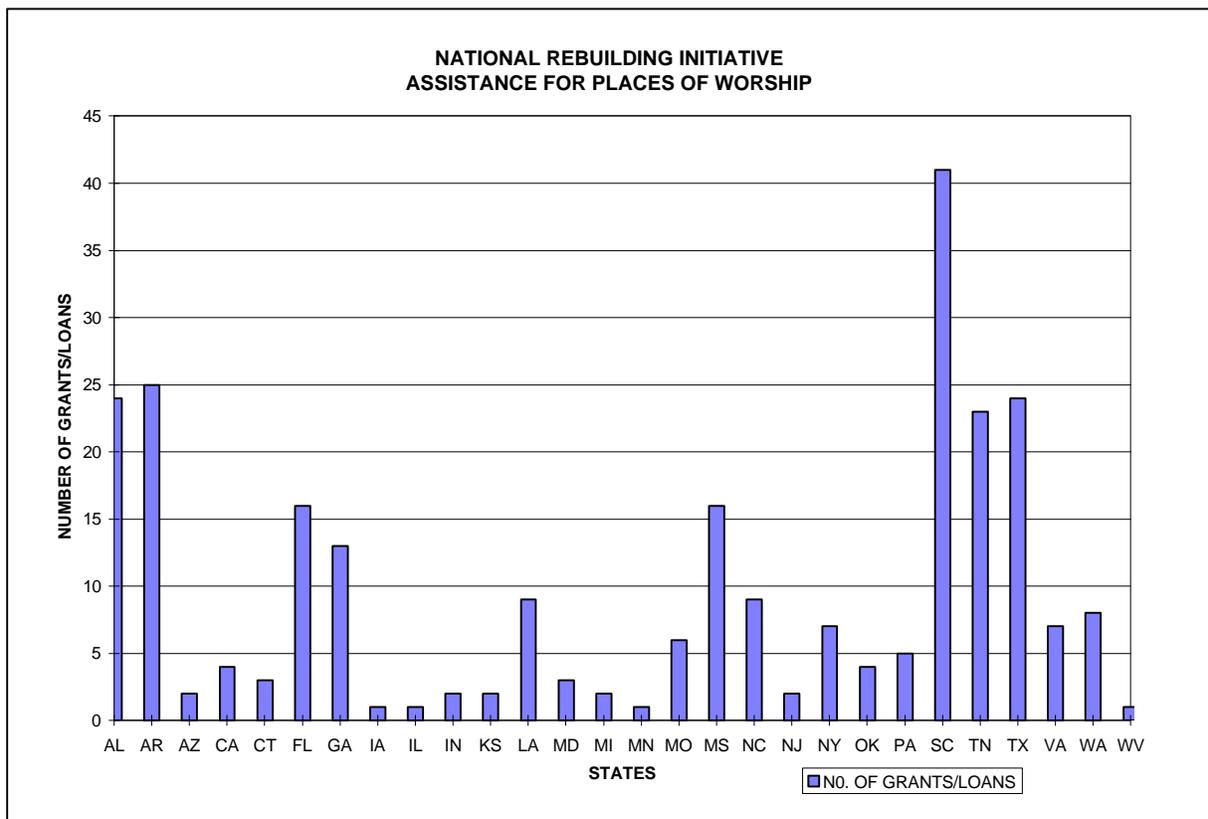
Between January 1, 1995 and October 5, 1999, federal, state, and local prosecutors successfully obtained convictions of 287 defendants in connection with 206 arsons or bombings of houses of worship. (See Appendix 1, Chart Z; see also Appendix 2 for a list of incidents in which a conviction has been obtained between September 9, 1998 and October 5, 1999). Of the 73 defendants who have been convicted of federal charges, 39 defendants were convicted of crimes arising from 24 arsons or bombings motivated by bias. Thirty of those defendants were convicted of hate crimes charges, and the remaining nine were convicted of, or were allowed to plead guilty to, other federal charges. (See Appendix 3 for a list of Federal hate crimes convictions.)

REBUILDING

The Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996 authorized the establishment of a Loan Guarantee Recovery Fund for use by HUD to assist in rebuilding places of worship damaged or destroyed by arson. With this \$10 million funding mechanism, HUD can guarantee specific loans made by financial institutions to nonprofit organizations, including houses of worship, to aid in rebuilding property damaged or destroyed by an act or acts of arson or terrorism.

In addition to administering the Loan Guarantee Recovery Fund, HUD continues to work in partnership with the National Council of Churches (NCC) and the Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC), which also provide assistance to congregations in their rebuilding efforts. HUD Secretary Cuomo created this public-private partnership under the National Rebuilding Initiative, which has been maintained by the partnership to aid in the rebuilding of houses of worship. While the partners provide grants for rebuilding, HUD provides loan guarantees.

To date, the partnership has provided approximately \$12.4 million in direct assistance for the rebuilding of burned places of worship. Of this amount, approximately \$9 million was in the form of grants awarded by the NCC and the CNBC. Additionally, approximately \$3.3 million was provided as private loans guaranteed by HUD. This combined assistance of grants and guaranteed loans has resulted in assistance to burned places of worship in twenty-eight states. The chart below illustrates assistance by states. States in the South have received most of the financial support and related resources.



In addition to this direct assistance, over 300 places of worship have been contacted and evaluated as to their rebuilding plans and needs. Of those places of worship, 70 have been completely rebuilt and another 89 are in various stages of rebuilding.

Grants and guaranteed loan funds have been used to finance a wide variety of rebuilding activities to include acquisition of real property, construction materials, furnishings, plans and specifications, site improvements, the installation of security systems, and related costs. Also, much has been provided in the form of in-kind contributions to the rebuilding effort. Such contributions have been in the form of volunteer labor and project management, architectural and legal assistance, donated lumber, construction modules, pews, altar furnishings, bibles, hymnals, and choir robes. The sources of in-kind contributions have been many, including other congregations around the country, private companies, nonprofit organizations and individuals.

In addition to financial assistance, in-kind contributions, and volunteer coordination, the rebuilding effort aided places of worship in yet another important way: the provision of technical assistance. The National Council of Churches conducted site assessments and visits, and provided each congregation with the information, resources and networking that addressed their individual situation. The CNBC also performed assessments, assisted with construction planning, made insurance and fire prevention information available, established a special arson prevention program, and made on-site visits. HUD provided detailed information on the loan guarantee program, and continued to identify financial institutions interested in providing rebuilding loans for guarantee by HUD.

Recent Activity

In an effort to ensure adequate rebuilding resources, HUD, with participation by the Departments of Treasury and Justice, convened a conference with senior-level officials of the Nation's largest financial institutions (banking, mortgage banking, and credit unions) to discuss the continuing need for their participation in making loans to restore places of worship. Seventeen senior officials attended the conference. A few others not able to attend made HUD aware of their interest in being part of a participating lenders group for those places of worship that may need assistance in rebuilding. HUD understands the importance of maintaining this special partnership and is acting on a number of recommendations made by the financial institution representatives to improve the loan-making and the loan guarantee process.

Future Actions

HUD plans to reach out periodically with a public-private partnership perspective to those who can provide the assistance needed to restore, replace, and repair houses of worship destroyed or damaged by these heinous acts.

In the upcoming months, in continuation of its outreach efforts, HUD will again host a set of conferences in various parts of the country for affected congregations interested in the HUD loan guarantee process and in receiving training on that process and in the area of financial management.

Assistance to Date

As of October 5, 1999, approximately \$3.3 million in loan guarantee commitments were made to ten different churches. These churches include: Emmanuel Church (Decatur, AL), Second New Light OFW Baptist Church (Bridgeport, CT), New Birth Temple Church of God In Christ (COGIC, Shreveport, LA), Greater Mount Zion Tabernacle (Portsmouth, VA), New Harvest Baptist (Town of Cornwall, NY), Bethel AME Church (Monroeville, PA), Southtowns Christian Center (Lakeview, NY), Avenue M COGIC (Birmingham, AL), Springhill Missionary Baptist Church (Memphis, TN), and Greater Holy Temple COGIC (Wichita, KS).

Who May Apply

The HUD loan guarantee process accepts applications from nonprofit organizations, including houses of worship, which are described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986. Though the organization may not have sought or obtained a ruling from the IRS under this section, its purpose must be consistent with that of organizations described therein. To qualify, a federal, state, or local fire official must certify the fire at the place of worship to be arson. For purposes of the guarantee process, the financial institution which serves as a lender may be a bank, trust company, savings and loan association, credit union, mortgage company, or other issuer regulated by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Office of Thrift Supervision, the Credit Union Administration, or the U.S. Comptroller of the Currency. The financial institution may also be a pension fund.

Application Process

A place of worship initiates the loan-making process by submitting a HUD application to a local bank or other financial institution requesting a rebuilding loan. The financial institution reviews the application, seeks additional financial data (if necessary), conducts its underwriting analysis (using its own underwriting standards), and makes a submission to HUD requesting a loan guarantee. The Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development is authorized to guarantee up to 100% of the loan amount.

HUD will participate in the rebuilding process through new construction, rehabilitation of real property, refinancing of existing debt, or restoration or acquisition of personal property, and related costs. Assistance may be given if the insurance proceeds for the property are not sufficient to complete rebuilding or to reimburse the related loss/damage.

PREVENTION

Community-Based Arson Prevention Efforts

Efforts to prevent arsons from occurring represent the third prong of the President's national strategy. Working under the National Arson Prevention Initiative, communities continue to create coalitions and are provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with the tools and technical assistance necessary to battle arson.

The Initiative issued \$225,000 in Arson Prevention Grants to 14 cities in Fiscal Year 1998 and \$125,000 to eight communities in Fiscal Year 1999. These funds will be used to build community-based coalitions and combat arson at the grassroots level.

The following cities each received \$15,000 in FY 1998:

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|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Sacramento, California | Lynn, Massachusetts |
| Baltimore, Maryland | New York City, New York |
| Burlington, Vermont | Youngstown, Ohio |
| Clark County/Las Vegas, Nevada | Portland, Oregon |
| Danville, Illinois | Houston, Texas |
| New Orleans, Louisiana | Milwaukee, Wisconsin |
| Duluth, Minnesota | |

The following cities are setting up regional coalitions and receiving \$30,000: Orange County, Florida; Osceola County, Florida; and Orlando, Florida. This regional alliance will offer services to 15 cities with an estimated population of 950,000.

The following cities each received \$15,625 in FY 1999:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Anchorage, Alaska | Camden, New Jersey |
| Denver, Colorado | Oklahoma City, Oklahoma |
| Spartanburg, South Carolina | Elisabeth, Pennsylvania |
| Cedar Falls, Iowa | Woonsocket, Rhode Island |

These cities join the four original Initiative municipalities of Macon, Georgia; Charlotte, North Carolina; Nashville, Tennessee; and Utica, New York.

Most communities have used their arson prevention grants to address juvenile firesetting or church arson prevention. Other challenges include initiating church watch programs, boarding-up or demolishing vacant and abandoned buildings (Target Arson Program or TAP), developing stricter code enforcement, and implementing church arson awareness programs.

Arson Prevention Clearinghouse

The Clearinghouse was established to provide public education materials and coordinate technical assistance requests from communities. Accessible by a toll-free number (1-888-603-3100), the Clearinghouse has reached over three million individuals, organizations, and communities with arson awareness and prevention materials since its inception in 1996. Working through the National Council of Churches, the CNBC, and others in the religious community, thousands of houses of worship have been reached with arson prevention pamphlets and brochures. Materials distributed through the Clearinghouse include threat assessment and fire safety documents, juvenile firesetter intervention brochures, public education materials including bumper stickers, community organization information, and coalition building guidance manuals. The Clearinghouse distributes to affected communities more than 500,000 information packets annually.

Juvenile Firesetter Prevention

The initial and primary focus of the Initiative was to develop arson prevention awareness. The prevention of juvenile firesetting is also an issue currently being highlighted. These efforts complement the vigilant programs of the USFA, which has been combating this problem since the 1970's.

Along with the help of the USFA, the Initiative has developed three juvenile firesetting-training packages. They are Child Firesetter and Juvenile Arson Community Awareness, Professional Development, and Practitioner Training Needs.

Public Education

During the first week of May 1999, the Initiative sponsored National Arson Awareness Week for the third consecutive year. This event was built on the concept of creating an identifiable, unifying message for arson prevention. The three major goals of Arson Awareness

Week were to: 1) create a national umbrella of recognition, awareness, and understanding of arson problems throughout the United States; 2) highlight accomplishments and successes of the eighteen pilot communities under the Initiative and embrace ten additional communities as part of the coalition building effort; and 3) promote the dissemination of arson awareness, prevention, and investigation literature and training materials via the Clearinghouse. The Initiative worked with other partners such as the International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI) to help encourage communities to become involved in building solutions to their arson problems.

FEMA promoted broad public education efforts by enlisting the help of various national television, radio, and print media outlets. Chapters of the IAAI hosted events and activities in almost every state. Under the Initiative, the eighteen arson pilot cities and counties launched their arson prevention partnerships in 1997 with strong community support. One year later, the model programs they developed were showcased nationally and became the impetus for an additional ten communities to participate in the roll-out events during Awareness Week 1998. Some 150 cities across the country participated in that National Arson Awareness Week.

During Arson Awareness Week in 1999, the Initiative sponsored a seminar called "Community Awareness: Child Firesetting and Juvenile Arson." This was part of the National Town Meeting (NTM) for a Sustainable America that took place during May 2-8, 1999 in Detroit Michigan. The NTM highlights nationwide best practices and protocols for arson prevention. The "Community Awareness: Child Firesetting and Juvenile Arson" seminar, which was held at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland, was designed to generate community awareness about the role of fire service, law enforcement, and education personnel and to emphasize the seriousness and magnitude of the child firesetting and juvenile arson problem that exists nationally and locally. The program informed the community-at-large so they could better understand children's perception of fire and how it could be misused. It focused on motivating the community to form a community-based effort, involving all necessary services, organizations, agencies, and individuals and emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts. The audience for this successful presentation included fire service officers, law enforcement officials, childcare agencies, and members of both the USFA Program Office and the National Fire Academy.

Technical Assistance and Training

The Initiative and National Volunteer Fire Council sponsored an Arson Detection & Prevention in a Rural Communities seminar. The seminar also took place at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland in February 1999. The training targeted members of volunteer fire departments responsible for arson prevention and investigation and was supported by a grant from the Initiative.

During 1998 and 1999, the Initiative sponsored dozens of training seminars. These were delivered to local communities via the Council of National Black Churches, National Sheriffs Association, and the National Coalition of Burned Churches.

Memorandum of Understanding with Congress of National Black Churches, Inc.

Spearheaded by the Initiative, FEMA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the CNBC to provide training and public education for churches and houses of worship. The overarching goal of this initiative is to prevent arson and promote arson awareness. This confirmed the USFA commitment to providing a significant in-kind contribution to CNBC's Church Rebuilding and Arson Prevention efforts. The contribution will include technical assistance, mitigation, arson prevention materials, and training in the areas of community coalition building and arson prevention. In response to the problems at houses of worship, CNBC launched its three-year Church Rebuilding and Arson Prevention Program in January 1998 to rebuild burned churches, prevent arson, and promote multiracial and ecumenical inclusiveness for the new millennium. Since its inception, CNBC's Church Rebuilding Program has provided the financial support needed to rebuild 32 of the 50 targeted churches.

RECONCILIATION

The Community Relations Service plays a key role in the work of the Task Force. CRS continues to provide conflict prevention and resolution assistance to local officials, law enforcement authorities, clergy, and other leaders in some 17 states across the country. CRS regional offices, along with two contractors, have assumed responsibility for the work of the CRS Church Burning Response Team. Their close work with U.S. Attorneys, community leaders, and federal, state, and local law enforcement developed the relationship that facilitated the coordinated effort necessary for community healing and reconciliation to occur.

CRS is committed to dispatching conflict resolution and reconciliation experts from its regional offices to work directly with local communities to promote multiracial cooperation in the construction of houses of worship, and to provide technical assistance in ways that bring together law enforcement agencies and minority neighborhoods.

CONCLUSION

This year we have seen law enforcement, government agencies, private groups, and individuals continue their tireless and diligent efforts to investigate fires, identify and prosecute arsonists, rebuild houses of worship and restore communities.

While the statistics indicate great progress in the fight against church arsons, and while our community work yields refurbished and healing communities, our task is not yet complete. We have thus made combating arsons at America's houses of worship a permanent priority. We do this recognizing the continuing commitment necessary not only to prevent future fires, but also to heal racial divides.

Acknowledgment

The co-chairs of the Task Force would like to thank all of the investigators, prosecutors, state and local officials, and others who have worked tirelessly and so well over the course of the past three years. We would also like to thank our partners in these efforts at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Community Relations Service.

Respectfully submitted,



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