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United States Bomb Data Center

(U) House of Worship Incidents in the United States – 2019

USBDC Report



20-191

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Executive Summary

The 2019 *House of Worship (HOW) Incidents in the United States* report is a statistical product generated by the United States Bomb Data Center (USBDC). This report provides a detailed statistical analysis of HOW incidents in the United States that have been reported in the Bomb Arson Tracking System (BATS) over the past 5 years. BATS is a comprehensive Web-based arson and explosives incident repository, case management and reporting system. This system contains incident information that is contributed by more than 12,500 registered users that represent nearly 2,600 interagency partners. Currently, BATS contains more than 590,000 incidents documented by Federal law enforcement agencies, Department of Defense Explosive Ordnance Disposal units, public safety bomb squads, as well as fire and arson investigation units from participating Federal, State and local agencies.

Background

The USBDC's mission is to collect, analyze and disseminate critical arson and explosives incident information and intelligence to Federal, State, local and tribal law enforcement and public safety officials; military; and international partners. Additionally, the USBDC serves as the steward of BATS, which is the statutorily-mandated and Attorney General-designated national repository for explosives and arson related incident data. The main goal of the USBDC is to increase regional, national and international situational awareness to better detect, deter and prevent future criminal and terrorist acts.

Disclaimer

The data represented in this report has undergone an extensive quality assurance review process to clarify any ambiguities in incidents entered by the reporting agencies. The accuracy of the data is user-dependent; therefore, a small percentage may be incorrectly categorized. In addition, BATS is a dynamic incident management system; as such, this does not preclude the possibility that statistics represented may differ slightly from previously reported data. This can occur when the owner of a specific record(s) updates and makes changes to that record, such as reclassifying the incident type or materials recovered. The reader should also be aware that when compared to the data reflected in the *Uniform Crime Report* and/or National Fire Incident Reporting System, the number of incidents reflected in BATS captures less than 20 percent of the annual incendiary (arson) fires reported. Due to this limited dataset, the USBDC cautions the use of this report for analytical purposes.

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House of Worship (HOW) Definition

The term “house of worship” (HOW), as used within the context of this report, is defined as a religious-affiliated property to include rectory, office, school, funeral parlor, etc. It may also include private property, such as vehicles owned by persons working or attending a church service.

HOW Incident Categories

During 2019, there were 234 incidents reported in BATS involving HOWs. This total number of incidents reflects a 5-percent increase from the 222 HOW incidents reported during 2018, along with a similar decrease when compared to the average number of incidents (247) over the previous 5 calendar years (2014–18).

The data summarized in figure 1 illustrates the incident category and the total number of BATS reported incidents associated with HOWs, whereas figure 2 depicts the 5-year trend line for HOW-related incidents between 2014 and 2019.

INCIDENT CATEGORY	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Accidental	51	53	42	30	50	47	273
Incendiary	83	122	92	99	76	95	567
Natural	6	2	3	3	4	5	23
Undetermined	60	84	98	65	68	77	452
Bombing	5	6	5	3	1	0	20
Hoax	7	7	6	2	4	3	29
Bomb Threat	9	19	10	41	19	7	105
Total	221	293	256	243	222	234	1,219

Figure 1. Number of Incidents Associated with HOWs, 2014–19

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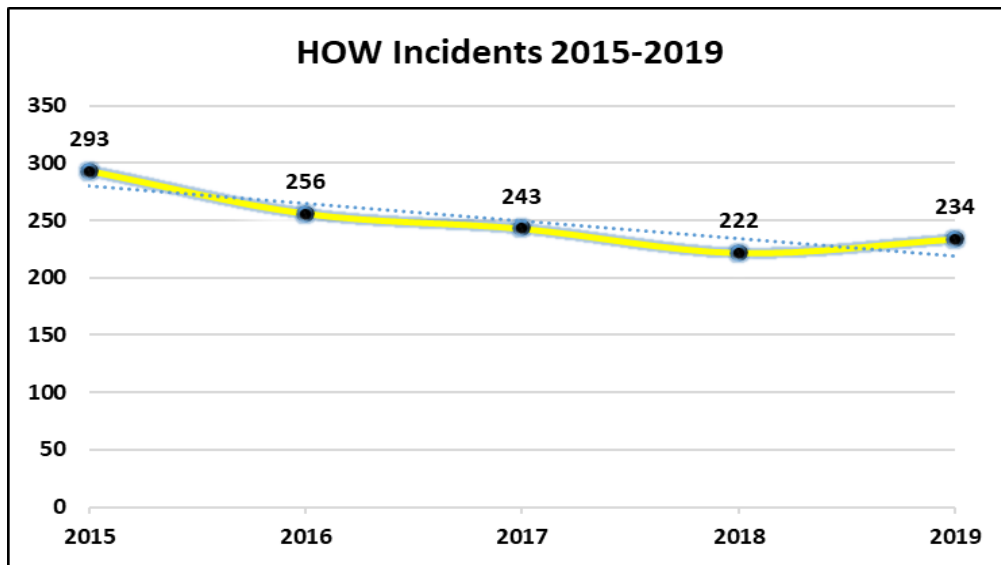


Figure 2. Trend Line for HOW Incidents, 2015–19

Bombing/Explosives Related HOW Incidents

During 2019, there were 10 *Bombing/Explosives* related incidents that targeted HOWs. These incidents included actual bombings/explosions, bomb/arson threats and bomb hoaxes. While this total number of incidents reflects a 58-percent decrease from the 24 incidents reported during 2018, the 2019 total was only a 17-percent decrease when compared to the average number of incidents (29) over the previous 5 calendar years (2014–18).

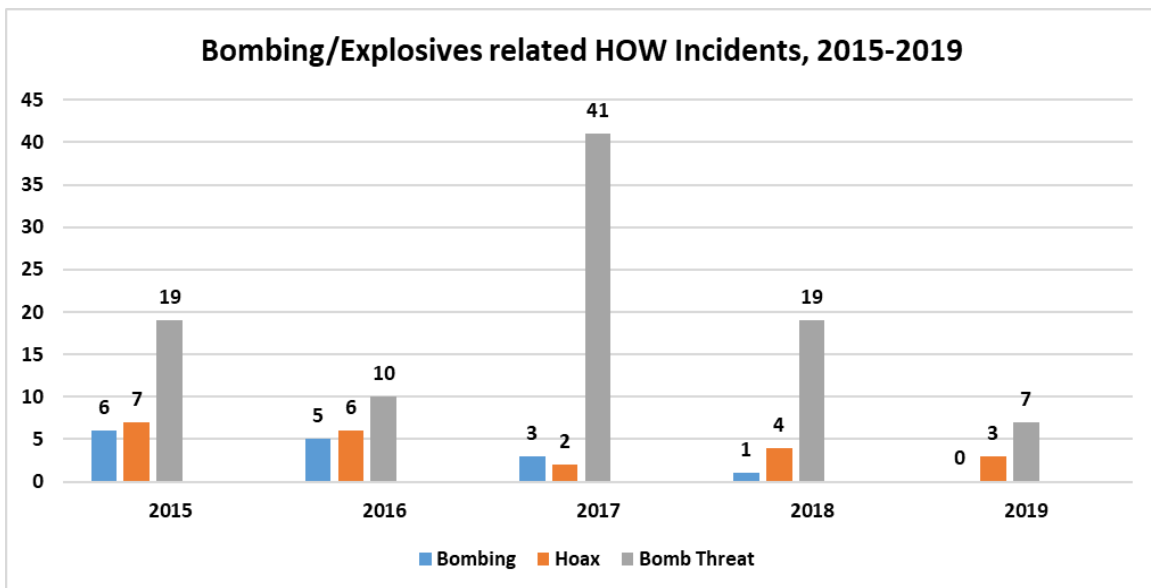


Figure 3. Bombing/Explosives Related HOW Incidents, 2015–19

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Bombings

There were no incidents of a “Bombing” targeting HOWs reported in BATS during 2019. This incident rate reflects a 100-percent decrease from the one (1) incident reported during 2018. The 2019 total was also a 400-percent decrease when compared to the average number of incidents (4) over the previous 5 calendar years (2014–18).

Hoaxes

There were three (3) incidents of a “Hoax” device targeting HOWs reported in BATS during 2019. This total number of incidents reflects a 25-percent decrease from the four (4) incidents reported during 2018. The 2019 total was a 40-percent decrease when compared to the average number of incidents (5) over the previous 5 calendar years (2014–18).

All three (3) “Hoax” incidents targeted the “Christian” denomination.

Threats

There were seven (7) incidents of a “Threat” targeting HOWs reported in BATS during 2019. This total number of incidents reflects a 63-percent decrease from the 19 incidents reported during 2017. The 2019 total was a 64-percent decrease when compared to the average number of incidents (20) over the previous 5 calendar years (2014–18).

The “Christian” denomination was identified in four (4) incidents, along with “Islam” being identified in two (2) incidents and the “Judaism” denomination being reported as a target for one (1) incident.

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Characteristics of Incendiary Fires Targeting HOWs

Incendiary Fire Subtypes

Of the 95 incendiary (arson) fire related incidents reflected in BATS during 2019, 28 were listed as involving an “Accelerant,” along with 46 incidents involving “Available Combustibles” and 8 involving an “Incendiary Device.” There were also 13 incidents where the subtypes were listed as “Unknown” or left blank by the user.

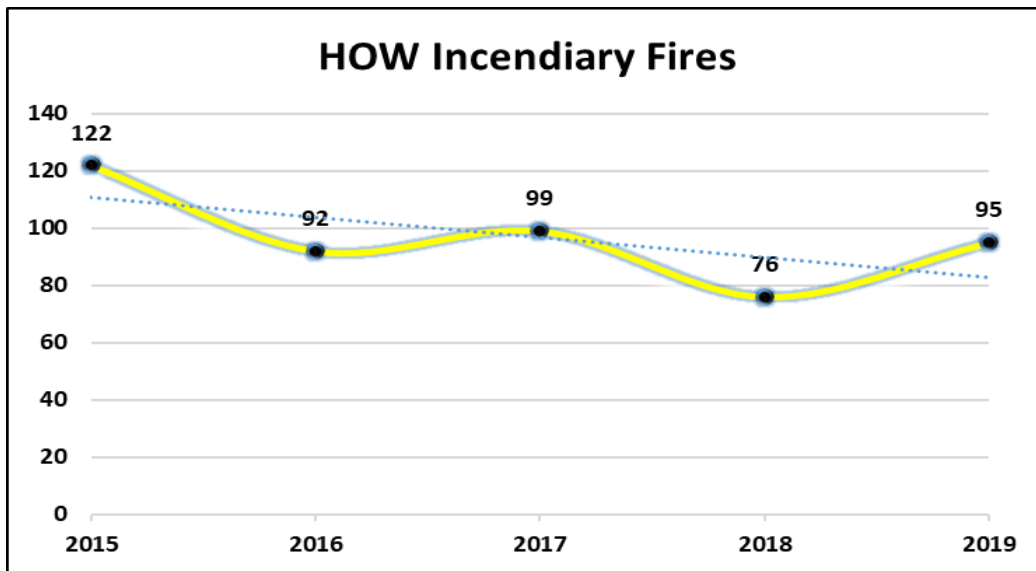


Figure 4. HOW Incendiary Fires, 2015-19

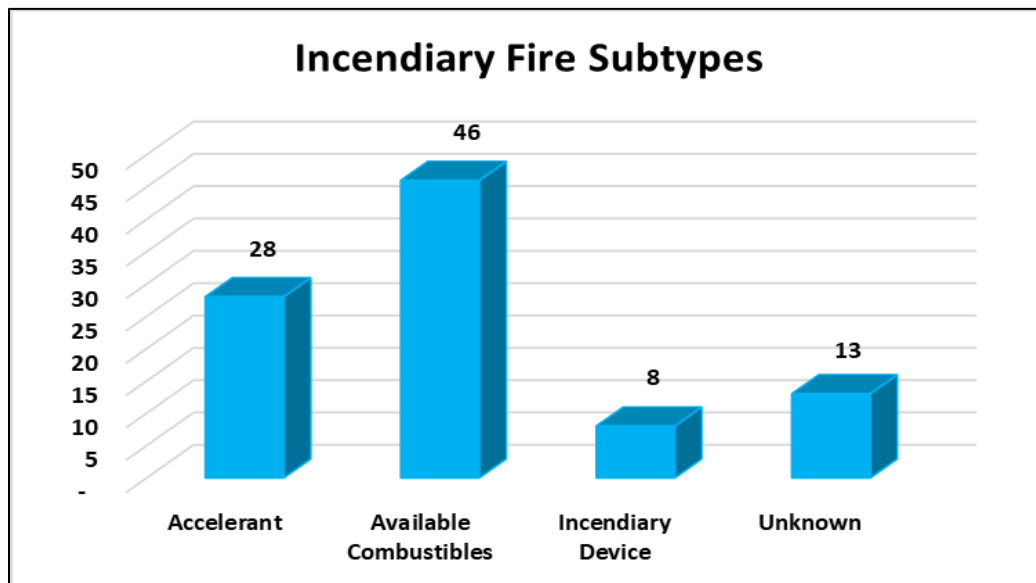


Figure 5. Incendiary Fire Subtypes Associated with HOWs – 2019

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Time/Day/Month of Occurrence

A review of the time of day that “Incendiary” fires occurred showed a minimal difference between the hours of daylight and darkness. A review of incidents listed as “Incendiary” occurring during the predominant hours of darkness (21:01 until 06:00) identified 49 incidents or 52 percent of all incendiary incidents associated with HOWs during 2019. The period of 06:01 until 12:00 (daylight morning hours) accounted for 19 incidents or 20 percent, while the afternoon and early evening hours (12:01 until 21:00) also accounted for 27 incidents or 28 percent.

A review of the day of the week that “Incendiary” fires occurred revealed that 21 incidents or 33 percent of all incendiary fires targeting HOWs occurred on the weekend (Saturday and Sunday). In addition, Sunday had the least reported incidents at 10, while Friday had the highest weekday number of reported incidents at 17.

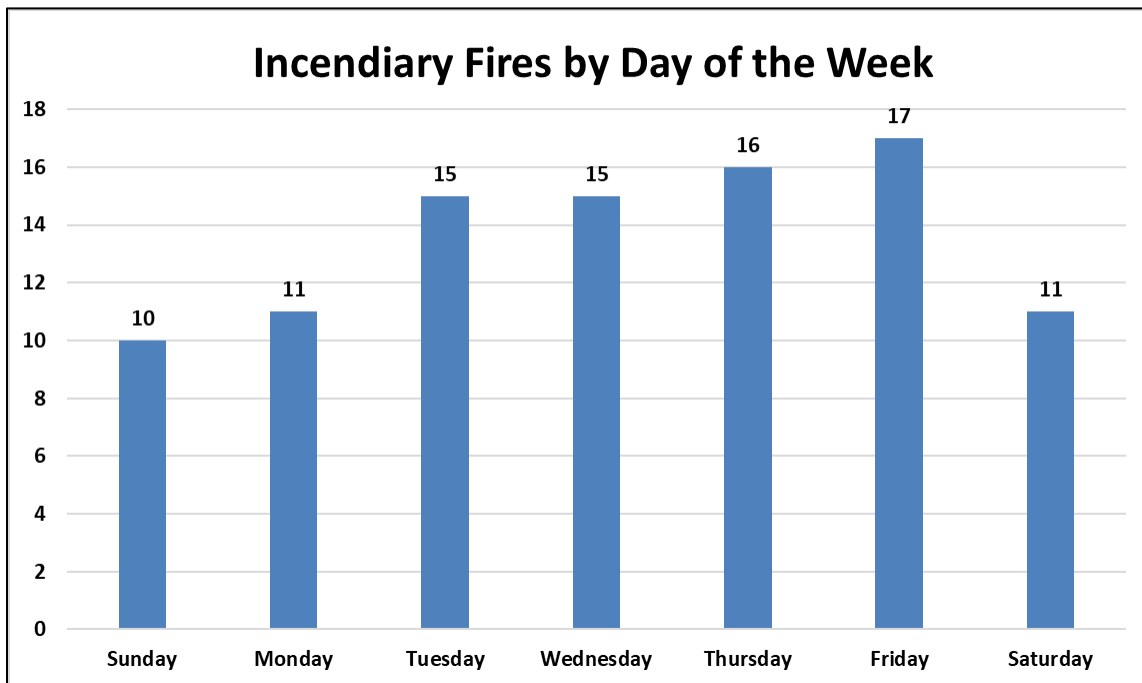


Figure 6. Incendiary Fires by Day of the Week – 2019

A review of the month that “Incendiary” fires occurred revealed a high number of incidents during the spring months (March-May), with 23 incidents or 35 percent of all incendiary HOW incidents. The fall months (September-November) accounted for only 19 incidents or 20 percent. The month of April was identified as the most frequent month of the year in which an “Incendiary” fire may occur, with 14 incidents (or 15 percent). The month of November was identified as having the lowest frequency of “Incendiary” fires occurring, with three (3) incidents.

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Areas of Origin

The top 3 “Areas of Origin” identified for the 95 “Incendiary” fires associated with HOWs reported in 2019 were “Assembly, Sales Areas,” “Means of Egress” and “Multiple Places of Origin/Placement.”

Areas of Origin	Total
Assembly, Sales Areas (Groups of People)	11
Function Areas	4
Means Of Egress	10
Multiple Places of Origin / Placement	7
Other	5
Storage Areas	1
Structural Areas	5
Transportation, Vehicle Areas	1
Unknown/Not Reported	51

Figure 7. Areas of Origin for HOW Incendiary Fires – 2019

Fire Descriptors

The top 3 “Fire Descriptors” identified for the 95 “Incendiary” fires reported in 2019 were “Ignitable Liquid – Area of Origin,” “Open Flame,” and “Ordinary Combustibles.”

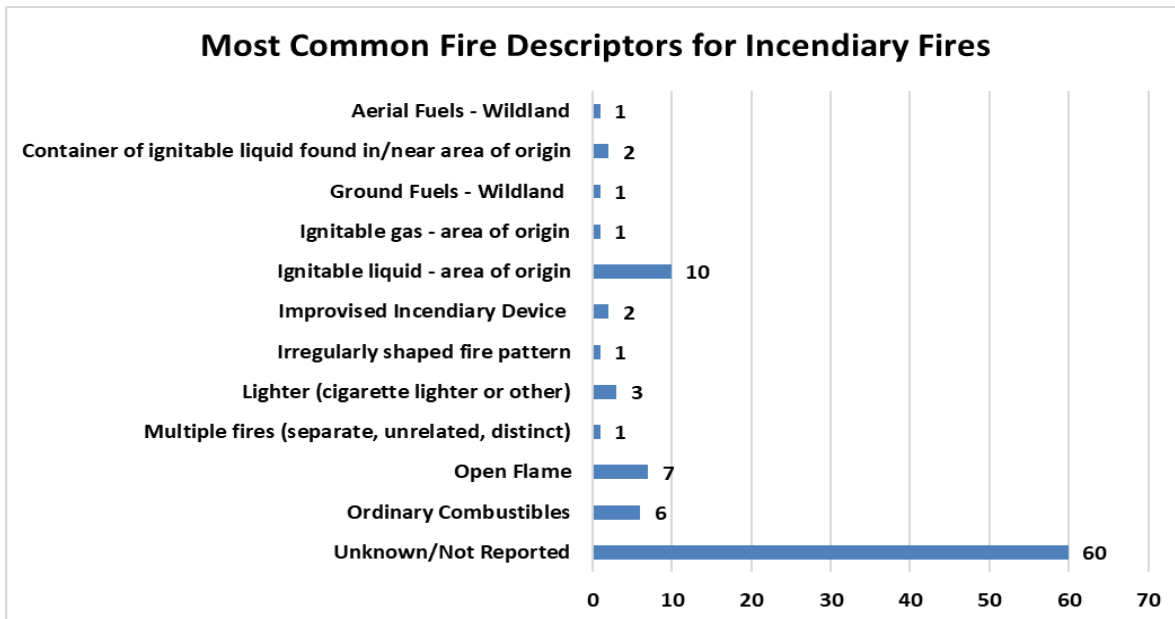


Figure 8. Most Common Fire Descriptors for HOW (Incendiary) Fires – 2019

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Casualties

HOW Fire Casualties 2018



There were no deaths associated with HOW incidents reported in BATS for 2019. Of the three (3) injuries, two (2) were identified as “Fire Service” and one (1) was identified as “Suspect.”

Damages

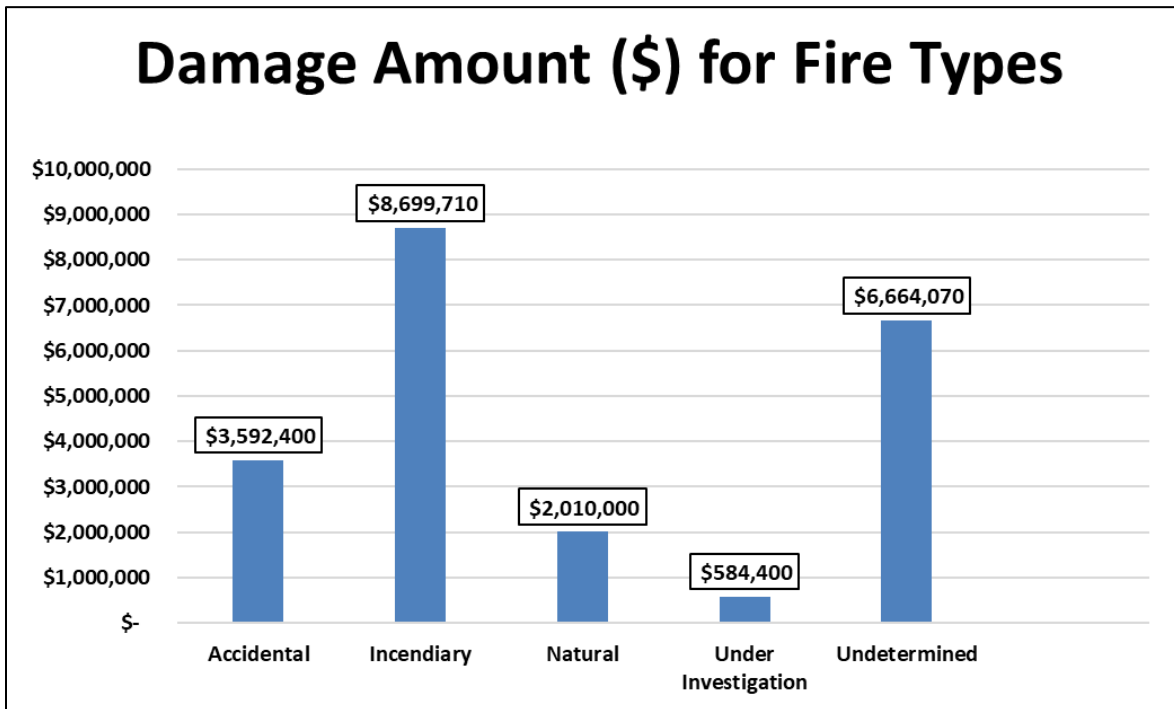


Figure 9. Damage Amounts for 2019 HOW Fires

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Damages associated with the 224 HOW-related fire incidents reported in BATS totaled more than \$21,550,580 for calendar year (CY) 2019. Fires listed as “Incendiary” led the fire type category with \$8,699,710 in damages.

Incendiary Fires		Undetermined Fires		Accidental Fires	
Chapel	\$ -	Chapel	\$ -	Chapel	\$ -
Church	\$ 8,699,210	Church	\$ 6,664,040	Church	\$ 2,789,400
Funeral Parlor	\$ 500	Funeral Parlor	\$ -	Funeral Parlor	\$ 508,000
Mosque	\$ -	Mosque	\$ -	Mosque	\$ -
Other	\$ -	Other	\$ -	Other	\$ 255,000
Synagogue	\$ -	Synagogue	\$ -	Synagogue	\$ -
Temple	\$ -	Temple	\$ -	Temple	\$ 40,000
Total	\$ 8,699,710	Total	\$ 6,664,040	Total	\$ 3,592,400

Figure 10. Damage Amounts for 2019 HOW Fires

HOW properties identified as a “Church” were the leading target of HOW types associated with “Incendiary” (arson) fires, with damages at \$8,699,210. “Undetermined” fires were second, with damages at \$6,664,040, and fires listed as “Accidental” were third, with \$3,592,400 in damages.

Denomination

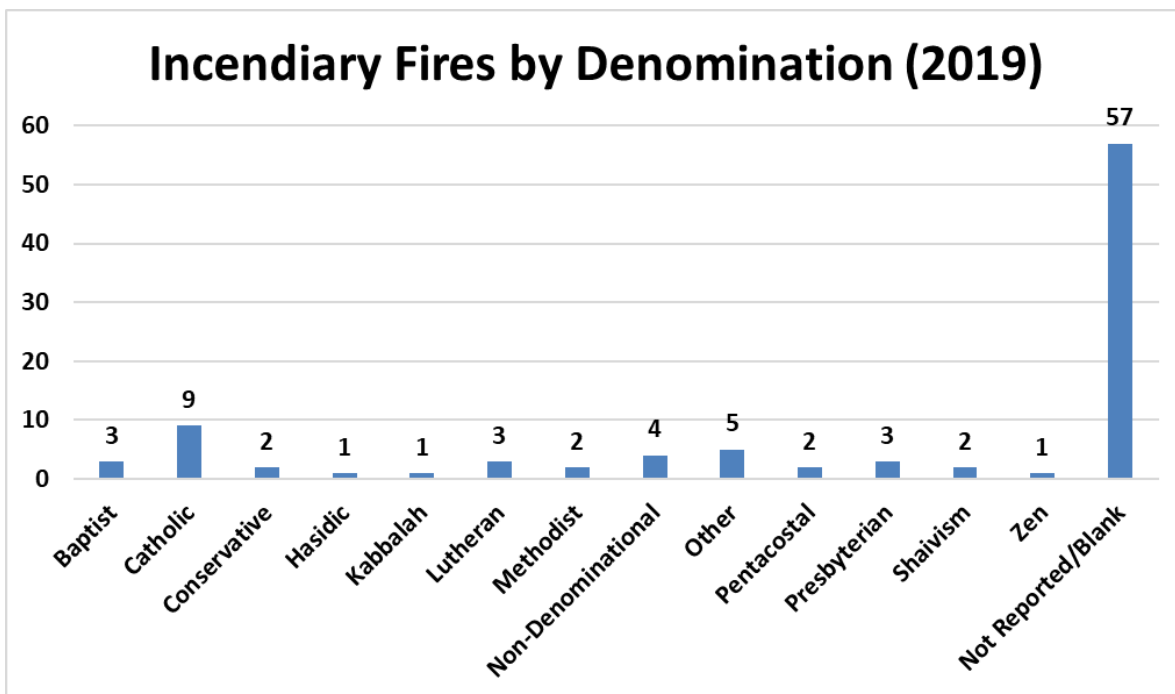


Figure 11. 2019 Incendiary Fires by Denomination

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Of the 95 “Incendiary” HOW fires reported in 2019, the denomination of “Catholic” was identified in 9 instances, or 9 percent of the time, followed by “Other,” which was identified 5 times (5 percent) and “Non-Denominational” 4 times (4 percent).

Motivations

There are currently nine types of motivation available for selection within BATS for an “Incendiary” fire. The top 3 types of known motivation selected for the 95 “Incendiary” fires reported during 2019 were “Vandalism,” “Revenge” and “Crime Concealment.”

Incendiary Fire Motivations (2019)

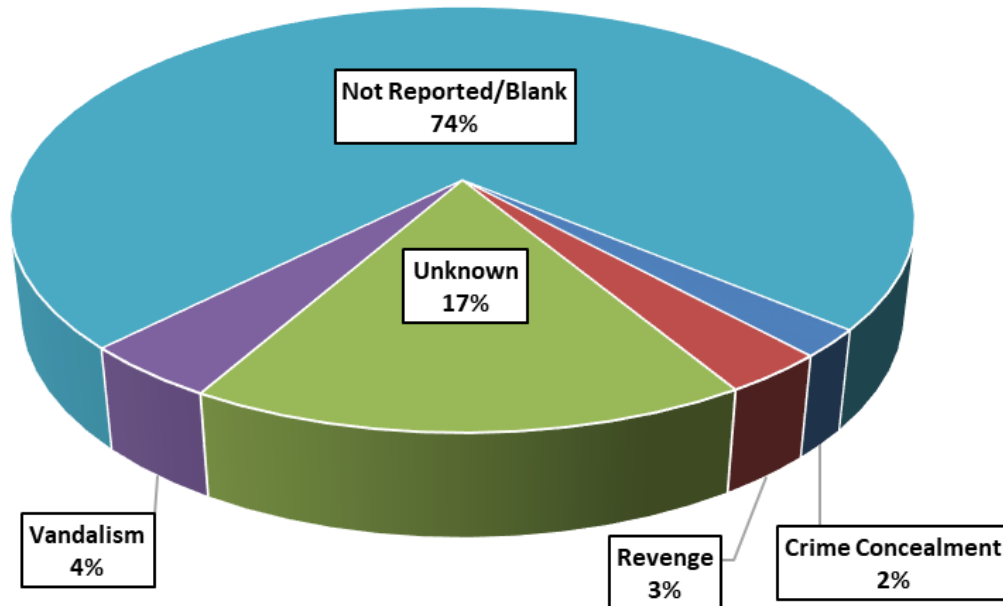


Figure 12. Incendiary Fire Motivations – 2019

The motivation category of “Unknown” was selected 17 percent of the time, while users failed to list or report a motive for the incendiary HOW fire 74 percent of the time. The trend of not reporting the motive of incendiary HOW fires has been consistent over the past 3 years.

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MOTIVATION CATEGORY	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	TOTAL
Crime Concealment	3	1	0	3	2	9
Excitement	1	2	2	1	0	6
Extremist	0	1	1	0	0	2
Other	1	1	2	1	0	5
Profit	0	0	0	0	0	0
Revenge	1	3	5	0	3	12
Serial Arson	3	2	0	7	0	12
Unknown	32	20	24	15	16	107
Vandalism	8	6	4	2	4	24
Not Reported/Blank	73	56	61	47	70	307

Figure 13. Incendiary Fire Motivations, 2015–19

Locations

A review of the 95 “Incendiary” HOW fires reported in BATS during 2019 by location (State) revealed the highest number of incidents were reported in Texas with 16 incidents, followed by California, Illinois, Missouri and Utah with 7 incidents each. These five States accounted for more than 46 percent of all HOW “Incendiary” fires reported in BATS during 2019.

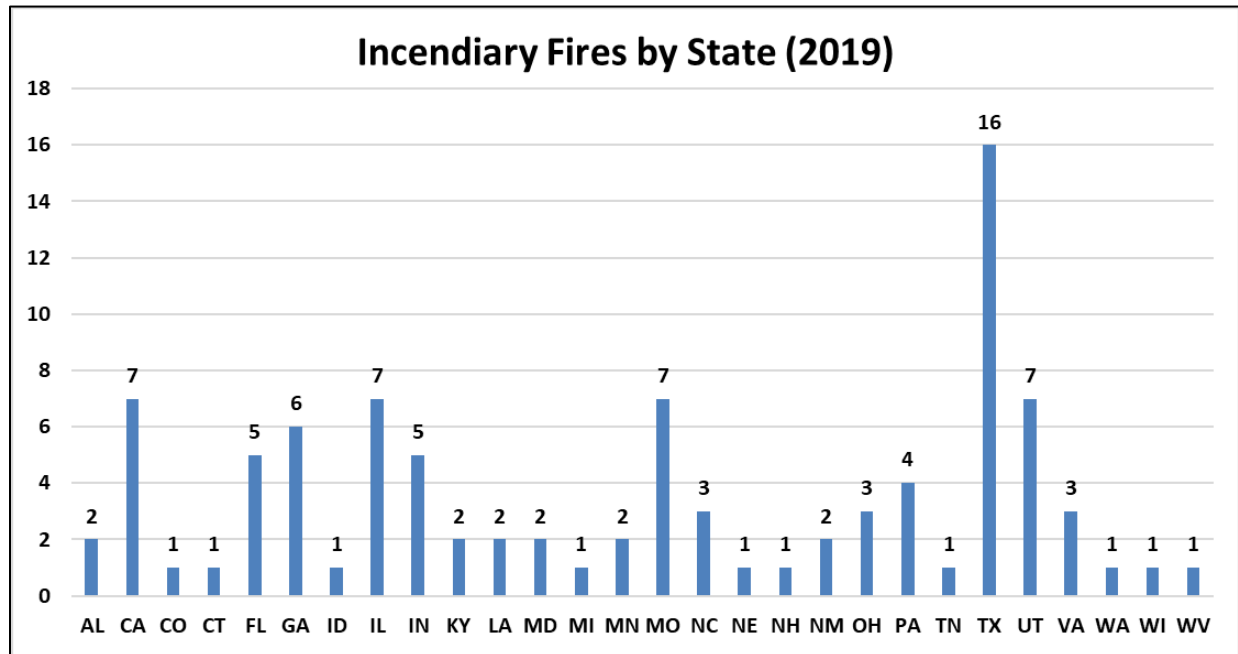
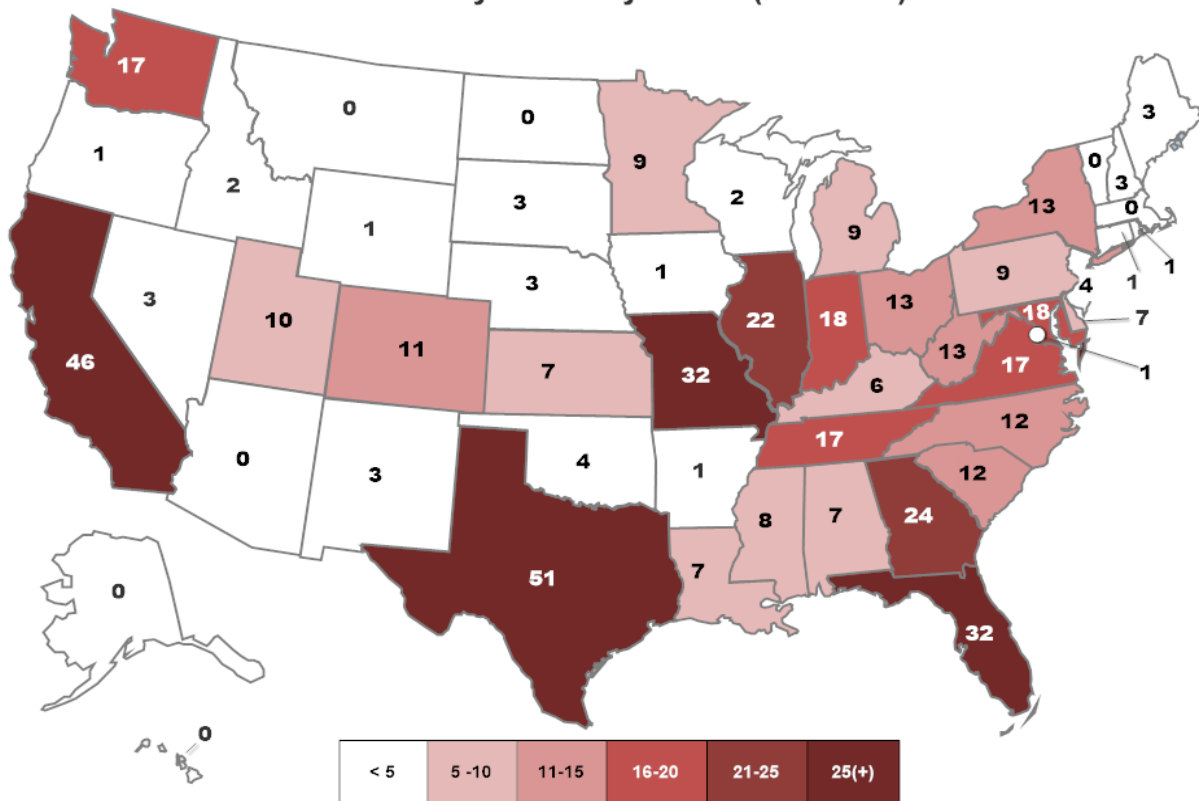


Figure 14. Incendiary Fires by State – 2019

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A breakdown of location (by State) for the 484 Incendiary HOW fires reported during the last 5 years (2015–19) revealed the highest number of incidents were reported in Texas (51), followed by California (46), along with Florida and Missouri (each with 32).

Incendiary Fires by State (2015-19)



Conclusion

During 2019, BATS captured a total of 234 *HOW-related* incidents that were investigated and reported by local, State and Federal agencies. This was an increase (5 percent) in the overall type of incidents associated with HOWs when compared to data from 2018. A review of the various categories and types listed in this report—which included Bombings/Explosions, Threats, Hoaxes and multiple types of fire (Accidental, Incendiary, Natural, Undetermined and Under Investigation)—also revealed a noteworthy increase in “Incendiary” fires.

Of the 234 incidents reported in 2019, only 10 involved “Bombings, Bomb Threats or Hoaxes” with the remaining 224 incidents involving a fire-related occurrence. HOW fire-related incidents resulted in more than \$21.5 million in damages, along with three (3) injuries and no deaths. Of the seven (7) “Bomb or Bombing Threats” directed at HOWs in 2019, 57 percent of the threats

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were directed at the Christian denomination. The Catholic denomination was identified as the principal victim of HOW incendiary fires in 9 of the 95 reported incidents.

Data suggests that States such as Texas, California, Florida and Maryland are having a higher occurrence of HOW-related incendiary fires when compared to the rest of the United States. These States also have a larger BATS user population than those areas with fewer reported incidents.

Reference

(U) The data provided herein is for informational purposes only. Any questions or comments can be directed to the USBDC at (800) 461-8841 or usbdc@atf.gov. Reference USBDC Report 20-191 when calling.

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