



Recognizing Suspicious Activity as it Relates to Wildfires

Suspicious activity can be described as something that is not normal behavior or draws your attention. Not every act that appears suspicious is criminal. However, something that draws your attention and causes concern should be checked out by law enforcement as a precaution.

In investigating wildfires over the years, arson investigators advise there are certain acts or behaviors that should be recognized as suspicious and reported to law enforcement. As wildfire season approaches, we all need to be vigilant. Below is a brief summary of these behaviors.

- The profile for an arsonist that ignites wildfires is a white male, usually in his late teens to early 30's.
- This person tends to visit the same spot over and over again as he decides if it will be the ideal place for him to start a fire.
- An arsonist could be familiar with the area but chances are he isn't a resident to the neighborhood or lives in the immediate area. He will live close by though, so he can watch the fire as it spreads.
- Arsonists will want to start the fire quickly and will use some type of accelerant, such as gasoline. Most people who are transporting gasoline do not want to smell the fumes and will place a gas can either in the bed of a pickup truck or in the trunk of a vehicle. An arsonist will only spend a few minutes starting a fire, in fear of getting caught, so wants to have quick access to the accelerant. Something that should be reported right away is a vehicle with a gas can sitting on the front floorboard on the passenger side of a vehicle.
- Once this person decides on the location to start the fire, he will park on the side of the road and walk a short distance to the pre-determined location. Or you may see a vehicle parked at a shopping plaza and a person will then ride a bicycle to the location. A serious bicyclist will usually park at a trail head and be dressed in typical clothing associated with bicyclist, not in blue jeans or other type of clothing.
- Chances are the arsonist will use a "hot set" or in other words, an open flame to light the fire. Tools most often used are lighters and road flares.
- And finally, the arsonist will want to talk about the fire almost constantly, before and after it has been set. He may say something to the effect that he would like to see a fire sweep through an area. Or he may give the impression he is obsessed about the fire and will want to discuss details about the fire after it has been set.

Any of these behaviors should arouse your suspicion and be reported right away to law enforcement or the local fire department. If you still are not sure if the behavior is that of an arsonist, write down the vehicle license plate number, a description of the vehicle (including anything that stands out, such as window decals or body damage) and a description of the person. Put this information in a safe place and if a fire does break out, report the information right away. It could very well be that you witnessed the arsonist without realizing it.

How to Report Suspicious Activity

9-1-1 - is still the fastest and best way to report anything suspicious that is occurring at the moment. Be prepared to give as much information as you can in a concise manner. Basic information includes the location (if no address is available give cross streets), brief description of what you saw that made you suspicious, a brief description of the vehicle(s) involved and of the person(s) involved.

1-800-47-ARSON – this is WeTip’s line for reporting suspected arson activity anonymously. However, there is a delay in getting information to the proper agency so this resource should not be used as the wildfire is being set.

(909) 387-8313 - San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Dispatch – Operators are on duty 24 hours a day and are able to take information.

Reporting Suspicious Activity in the National Forest

(661) 723-3620 - Angeles National Forest Dispatch - This ANF dispatch number is good 24 hours a day and gets you to Fox Field in Lancaster.

(909) 383-5651 - San Bernardino National Forest Dispatch – This SBNF dispatch number at the Supervisor’s Office in San Bernardino is good 24 hours a day.



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