



What this Resource is About

Arson, wilful fire raising, in schools is a serious problem causing not only extensive structural damage, which is extremely costly to Local Authorities, but also having a deep emotional and disruptive effect, on those within the school itself, and on many sections of the local community.

Arson Combated Together (ACT) Toolkit

This resource is part of the Arson Combated Together Toolkit which has been developed to raise awareness of the consequences of arson and to help everyone concerned to implement regular prevention routines.

Teachers' Resource Pack

The content of the Teachers' Resource Pack is linked into the curriculum (English, Drama, Citizenship & PSD/PSHE primarily), and looks at peer pressure and the impact that this can have, assessment of risk, taking responsibility and encouraging 'Good Citizenship' within the school environment.

Teachers' Resource Pack Consist of:

- Background Information
- Playscript and notes, (it is hoped that students may work towards performing the play to parents, governors, as well as the rest of the school.)
- Activities
- Risk Assessments
- Miscellaneous Information
- Photocopiable sheets



What is Arson?

It is the malicious and voluntary burning of property without consent, causing damage and endangering life.

Arson is a problem for all of us and its effects are far reaching.

- Home Office research puts the cost of arson to the economy in England and Wales at £2.2 billion per year, with the cost of fire to the economy at £6.6 billion per year.
- British business insured fire losses are £700 million per year.
- Arson is thought to account for over half total insured fire losses – perhaps £325 million or more each year.

Around 3,000 people are injured and approximately 100 die in deliberate fires every year.

The deliberate destruction of property using fire as the weapon has been with us throughout history – so ‘arson’ goes back a long way!

However the incidence of arson is on the increase.

In the 1950’s only 5% of fires were arson – now it’s over 30%.



Who are the Arsonists?

You're probably thinking that arsonists must be a strange breed – far removed from you and me... but are they?

Are they pyromaniacs? (those people obsessed with a desire to set fire to things). Could they be: your next door neighbour, your brother, a student in your class, your best friend... with other reasons?

ARSONISTS OR FIRESETTERS CAN ACTUALLY BE DIVIDED INTO NINE MAIN CATEGORIES:

Those Who Commit Arson:

1. For financial or other reward.
2. To conceal other crimes.
3. For political purposes.
4. For self immolation (suicide).
5. For mixed or unclear reasons.
6. Who have a serious mental disorder.
7. Who are motivated by revenge.
8. Young adult vandalism and fire raising.
9. Who are pyromaniacs.

The fact is that the majority of cases of arson are caused by juveniles – often started through curiosity and fire play, but often getting out of control with really serious consequences.

They could be sitting in your class right now!



Juvenile Fire Setting

According to Andrew Muckley (a leading expert on arson):

Fire is a natural phenomenon and, early on, children see matches and lighters as toys. At 2-3 years old they have little sense of danger and need structured advice to tell them that objects such as matches are dangerous, never touch them.

Many young children are simply attracted to the flames and are fascinated by them. Muckley states that a child's interest in fire is progressive and can lead to either fire safe or fire risk behaviour.

Fire Safe Behaviour

Is when the child has learnt basic Fire Safety Education – has been given clear information on matches and lighters and about fire prevention, learnt safer behaviour and understands the dangers.

Fire Risk Behaviour

Is when the child's interest, or obsession, hasn't been addressed and their fascination is left unchecked. Little advice or instruction has been given and social and/or emotional deprivation is common.

These children could be:

- a.** Attention seekers
 - where the aim is not to hurt people or damage property necessarily, but to gain them attention and visual impact.
- b.** Angry or revengeful
 - not necessarily having a history of fireplay, may just be a chance occurrence to resolve an angry feeling.
- c.** Delinquent firesetter/arsonist
 - often to cover up other crimes.
- d.** Mentally confused/disturbed
 - usually due to a fixation with fire.
- e.** School arsonist
 - see overleaf for outline.



A School Arsonist

- **Usually a boy (between 13-15 years old)**
- Has poor verbal communication, unable to resolve angry feelings with words.
- Usually low achiever, functioning below potential.
- Probably smokes, carries matches/lighter.
- Frequently in trouble at school, often punished but with little effect.
- Tends to be moody, sullen, even morose some days.
- Associates with like minded, small anti-social peer group OR has few friends and is a loner.
- Moderate to frequent truancy.
- Has played with matches at least once, at school and also outside school/home.
- Little parental or little support at school, chaotic type family with poor emotional adjustment.

So is there a particular problem of arson in schools?



Arson in School

Counting the Cost

- Every week around 20 schools suffer an arson attack.
- Up to 40% of major fires in schools are thought to be arson.
- Arson in school costs approximately a staggering £100 million but this is not the full story.

The consequential cost is enormous – the need to find temporary accommodation, loss of irreplaceable records, teaching notes, course work etc, not to mention the effect on morale and performance of the school for many years. The consequences go into far deeper realms if there is personal injury, or even death. The emotional and physical damage and disruption can be immeasurable.

Why are Schools so Vulnerable?

- Soft targets.
- Often easy accessibility.
- Attractive materials and equipment.
- Target for vandalism.
- The attacks are often to conceal burglary (of computers etc).
- The break-ins are often through boredom, which leads to messing about and fire starts.

What Can You do to Reduce the Risk?

There are a range of actions that you can plan and prepare, alongside those listed overleaf; the ongoing project work with the students will strengthen your school's position, by raising awareness and reducing the risks.