

***Editorial:***  
**Arson**

According to the most recent data available from the Nation Fire Protection Association (NFPA), there were 30,500 intentionally set structure fires in 2008. In addition, there were an estimated 17,500 intentionally set vehicle fires for the same year. The structure fires resulted in \$866,000,000 in property loss while the vehicle fires cost this nation \$139,000,000 in property loss. For more information and statistics see [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org).

These figures are only estimates and are probably significantly lower than the actual numbers. The data was reported by fire departments that responded to the NFPA's 2008 Fire Experience Survey and is based on the U.S. Fire Administration's National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). Such public service personnel are usually more inclined to list the cause of a fire as something other than arson. However, the reported estimates highlight a significant causal factor in structure and automobile fires.

At Tedford & Henry, LLP, it has been our experience that arson fires are significantly under reported. This is especially true when there is heavy fire damage. In "total burn" or near "total burn" fire scenes, accelerant detection canines are often relied upon to identify the presence of an accelerant. With fire debris piled several feet deep and little remaining evidence of burn patterns associated with the initial ignition of the fire, the canines are often led through the fire scene without any preliminary work being done to delayer potential areas of origin to provide the canine with a better opportunity to detect the presence of an accelerant. Often, when the canine does not alert, arson is ruled out and the conclusion is quickly drawn that the fire was accidental. (See editorial by Mr. Andrew C. Fardy in the Winter/Spring 2008 Edition of Perspectives.)

In this issue of Perspectives we continue conclude our two-part series on arson to draw attention to this issue and to provide our insight into the reasons why arson fires are under reported.

~ **Frederick B. Tedford** ~