

ARSON

DEFINITION

Arson is defined by the Uniform Crime Reporting Program as any willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling, house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, personal property of another, etc.

Only fires determined through investigation to have been willfully or maliciously set are classified as arsons. Fires of suspicious or unknown origins are excluded.

Law enforcement agencies nationwide reported a total of 76,045 arson offenses in 1999. Of the 11,617 agencies that provided 1 to 12 months of arson data for the year, 11,550 agencies supplied detailed information such as the type of structure and estimated monetary value of the property damaged. These detailed data were tabulated for presentation on the following pages. Tables 12 through 15 offer further information regarding arson offenses and trends, and Tables 25 through 28 present additional figures on arson clearances. In viewing the arson tables, data users should be aware that although these numbers provide an indicator of arson incidents, they do not depict the Nation's total arson experience since only 8,061 agencies, representing 68 percent of the United States population, submitted arson reports for all 12 months of the year.

Overall, arson offenses declined 4 percent in 1999. Collectively, the Nation's cities reported a 5-percent decrease. Among specific population groups, cities with populations of 10,000 to 24,999 inhabitants registered the largest decrease at 7 percent. Rural counties experienced a 1-percent decrease, and suburban counties experienced virtually no change. (See Table 12.)

The number of arson offenses dropped in all four of the Nation's geographic regions. The Midwest observed a 7-percent decrease, and in the Northeast, arson offenses fell 6 percent. Reductions in arson totals were also experienced in the South and West, both at 2 percent.

By property type, the following decreases were noted nationally in 1999: structural arson declined 4 percent; arson of mobile property decreased 1 percent; and arson of all other properties (crops, signs, merchandise stored outside structures, etc.) declined 6 percent. (See Table 15.)

Table 2.31

Arson Rate

by Population Group, 1999

[8,061 agencies; 1999 estimated population 185,469,000; rate per 100,000 inhabitants]

| Population group | Rate |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| Total | 37.1 |
| Total cities | 42.4 |
| Group I (cities 250,000 and over) | 70.5 |
| (cities 1,000,000 and over) | 76.0 |
| (cities 500,000 to 999,999) | 63.6 |
| (cities 250,000 to 499,999) | 70.2 |
| Group II (cities 100,000 to 249,999) | 42.7 |
| Group III (cities 50,000 to 99,999) | 32.8 |
| Group IV (cities 25,000 to 49,999) | 26.6 |
| Group V (cities 10,000 to 24,999) | 20.8 |
| Group VI (cities under 10,000) | 25.8 |
| Suburban counties | 28.9 |
| Rural counties | 17.9 |
| Suburban area | 25.9 |

When reviewing arson trend information, data users should exercise caution since improved arson reporting procedures may have influenced percent change figures.

Rate

Arson rates per 100,000 inhabitants are tabulated independently since population coverage for arson data is lower than for the other Crime Index offenses. The 1999 rates for arson are presented in Table 2.31. Rates are based on figures from law enforcement agencies supplying statistical data for Index crimes for all 12 months of the year.

The national arson rate for 1999 was 37 per 100,000 population. The highest rate, 76 arsons per 100,000 inhabitants, was recorded in cities with populations over 1 million. Collectively, cities reported a rate of 42 per 100,000 population. Suburban counties recorded an arson rate of 29 and rural counties 18 offenses per 100,000 inhabitants.

Of the Nation's four regions, the West registered the highest arson rate with 37 offenses per 100,000 population. Following were the Midwest with 34 arson offenses reported per 100,000 inhabitants, the South with 27 per 100,000, and the Northeast with 25 per 100,000.

Nature

Arsons targeting structures, accounting for 45 percent of all incidents reported, were the most frequently reported arsons in 1999. Mobile properties (motor vehicles, trailers, etc.) were the target of 30 percent of reported arson offenses, and other types of properties (crops, timber, etc.) accounted for the remaining 25 percent.

Table 2.32

Arson

by Type of Property, 1999

[11,550 agencies; 1999 estimated population 205,609,000]

| Property classification | Number of offenses | Percent distribution ¹ |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Total | 66,321 | 100.0 |
| Total structure | 29,934 | 45.1 |
| Single occupancy residential | 12,905 | 19.5 |
| Other residential | 5,346 | 8.1 |
| Storage | 2,282 | 3.4 |
| Industrial/manufacturing | 352 | .5 |
| Other commercial | 3,158 | 4.8 |
| Community/public | 3,557 | 5.4 |
| Other structure | 2,334 | 3.5 |
| Total mobile | 19,965 | 30.1 |
| Motor vehicles | 18,945 | 28.6 |
| Other mobile | 1,020 | 1.5 |
| Other | 16,422 | 24.8 |

¹ Because of rounding, the percentages may not add to total.

Of all structural arsons during 1999, residential property arson comprised 61 percent, with 43 percent of structural arson offenses directed at single-family dwellings. Twenty percent of structure-related arsons involved property that was either uninhabited or abandoned at the time of the arson.

Mobile property arsons were most often comprised of motor vehicles, with 95 percent of the total.

The monetary value of property damaged due to reported arsons in 1999 averaged \$10,882 per incident. Overall, the average loss for all types of structures was \$19,533. Mobile property loss averaged \$5,425 per incident, and for other targets, losses averaged \$1,750.

Table 2.33

| Arson | | |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| Structures Not in Use, 1999 | | |
| [11,550 agencies; 1999 estimated population 205,609,000] | | |
| Type of structure | Number of offenses | Percent not in use |
| Total | 29,934 | 19.6 |
| Single occupancy residential | 12,905 | 22.7 |
| Other residential | 5,346 | 16.7 |
| Storage | 2,282 | 19.7 |
| Industrial/manufacturing | 352 | 20.2 |
| Other commercial | 3,158 | 16.2 |
| Community/public | 3,557 | 10.7 |
| Other structure | 2,334 | 27.2 |

Law Enforcement Response

Both nationwide and in cities collectively in 1999, an arson clearance rate of 17 percent was observed. In cities with under 10,000 inhabitants, law enforcement agencies registered the highest clearance rate, 28 percent. Rural counties recorded a 23-percent clearance rate, and agencies in suburban counties reported a 16-percent clearance rate. (See Table 25.)

Geographically, the Southern States, the Nation's most populous region, reported an arson clearance rate of 19 percent. The Midwestern States recorded an 18-percent rate, followed by the Northeastern States at 17 percent, and the Western States with 14 percent.

Representing a higher percentage of juvenile involvement than for any other Index crime, 48 percent of all 1999 arson clearances involved only juveniles (persons under age 18). Among the arson types, juveniles accounted for 26 percent of the clearances for arsons of mobile property, 47 percent of structural arson clearances, and 60 percent of those for arsons of all other property. In the Nation's cities collectively, 52 percent of arson clearances were attributed to juvenile offenders. Juveniles accounted for 44 percent of arson clearances in suburban counties and 31 percent in rural counties.

Table 2.34

| Arson | | |
|--|--------------------|----------------|
| Monetary Value of Property Damaged, 1999 | | |
| [11,550 agencies; 1999 estimated population 205,609,000] | | |
| Property classification | Number of offenses | Average damage |
| Total | 66,321 | \$10,882 |
| Total structure | 29,934 | 19,533 |
| Single occupancy residential | 12,905 | 15,611 |
| Other residential | 5,346 | 17,598 |
| Storage | 2,282 | 15,375 |
| Industrial/manufacturing | 352 | 152,464 |
| Other commercial | 3,158 | 34,704 |
| Community/public | 3,557 | 18,344 |
| Other structure | 2,334 | 10,960 |
| Total mobile | 19,965 | 5,425 |
| Motor vehicles | 18,945 | 4,945 |
| Other mobile | 1,020 | 14,350 |
| Other | 16,422 | 1,750 |

Clearance data from the 11,550 law enforcement agencies that furnished detailed information is provided in the accompanying tables that include a breakdown by type for structural and mobile classifications. Arson clearance rates ranged from 37 percent for industrial/manufacturing structures, to 7 percent for motor vehicles, as shown in Table 2.35.

Eighty-six percent of the estimated 16,800 persons arrested for arson nationally in 1999 were male. Fifty-four percent of the arrestees were under 18 years of age, and 70 percent were under 25. Whites accounted for 74 percent of the arrestees, blacks comprised 24 percent, and persons of other races made up the remainder.

Table 2.35

| Arson | | |
|--|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Offenses Cleared by Arrest ¹ , 1999 | | |
| [11,550 agencies; 1999 estimated population 205,609,000] | | |
| Property classification | Number of offenses | Percent cleared by arrest |
| Total | 66,321 | 17.2 |
| Total structure | 29,934 | 22.8 |
| Single occupancy residential | 12,905 | 24.0 |
| Other residential | 5,346 | 22.4 |
| Storage | 2,282 | 17.6 |
| Industrial/manufacturing | 352 | 36.6 |
| Other commercial | 3,158 | 16.7 |
| Community/public | 3,557 | 30.0 |
| Other structure | 2,334 | 18.0 |
| Total mobile | 19,965 | 7.6 |
| Motor vehicles | 18,945 | 7.1 |
| Other mobile | 1,020 | 16.0 |
| Other | 16,422 | 18.6 |

¹ Includes offenses cleared by exceptional means.

Table 2.36

Arson Offenses Cleared by Arrest¹
of Persons under 18 Years of Age, 1999
[11,550 agencies; 1999 estimated population 205,609,000]

| Property classification | Total clearances | Percent under 18 |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Total | 11,403 | 47.7 |
| Total structure | 6,834 | 46.9 |
| Single occupancy residential | 3,093 | 37.5 |
| Other residential | 1,196 | 41.1 |
| Storage | 401 | 62.3 |
| Industrial/manufacturing | 129 | 45.7 |
| Other commercial | 528 | 35.8 |
| Community/public | 1,067 | 76.2 |
| Other structure | 420 | 57.6 |
| Total mobile | 1,512 | 26.3 |
| Motor vehicles | 1,349 | 23.7 |
| Other mobile | 163 | 47.2 |
| Other | 3,057 | 60.2 |

¹ Includes offenses cleared by exceptional means.

Comparing figures from 1999 to those of the preceding year, arson arrests declined 3 percent nationally. By community type, rural counties reported a 7-percent decline, and cities collectively recorded a 5-percent decrease. In contrast, suburban counties observed a 6-percent increase in arson arrests.

Adult arrests for arson in 1999 were 7 percent lower than in the previous year. Juvenile arrests rose by 1 percent. Declines were reported in the arrests of both males, 3 percent, and females, 6 percent, during the same period.

An examination of the 5- and 10-year trends revealed that 1999 arson arrest totals for all ages were down 20 percent from the 1995 arrest total and 14 percent from the 1990 figure.