

# **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.

In 2000, there were 78,280 arson offenses reported by law enforcement nationwide. Of the 12,011 agencies that provided arson data for the year, 11,903 agencies supplied supplementary details such as type of structures and estimated monetary value of property damaged. That detailed information is presented in tabular format on the following pages. Information dealing with arson offenses and trends are presented in Tables 12 through 15. Tables 25 through 28 present data on arson clearances. Due to the somewhat limited number of agencies (8,023 which represented 76 percent of the Nation's population) submitting arson reports for all 12 months of the year, the data in these tables does not present a total picture of arson in the United States. Therefore, one should view the arson data in these tables as providing an indicator of arson incidents in the Nation.

There was a 0.4-percent increase in reported arson offenses in the country in the year 2000. However, the Nation's cities collectively reported a 0.2-percent decrease in reported arsons, the largest being in cities with populations of 1 million or more, 7.1 percent. In contrast, cities with populations of 10,000 to 24,999 saw an arson increase of 6.6 percent and cities of 25,000 to 49,999 inhabitants a rise of 5.6 percent. Rural counties registered a 0.5-percent decrease and suburban counties experienced a 2.7-percent increase. (See Table 12.)

Arson increased in three of the Nation's four regions in 2000. The Western States experienced the largest arson increase, 3.2 percent, the Midwestern States rose by 1.4 percent, and the Southern States by 0.3 percent. The Northeast recorded a 6.5-percent decrease in arsons.

When considering property type, the following shifts were seen nationally: structural arson fell 2.2 percent; arson of mobile property rose 4.4 percent; and the arson of all other properties (crops, signs, merchandise stored outside structures, etc.) climbed 2.9 percent. (See Table 15.)

Data users should be aware that improved arson reporting practices might influence percent change figures when analyzing arson trend information. Therefore, trends should be viewed with caution.

## Rate

Because population coverage for arson data is lower than for other Crime Index offenses, arson rates per 100,000 inhabitants are tabulated independently. The 2000 rates for arson are presented in Table 2.31. Rates are based on data provided by law enforcement agencies supplying statistics for Index crimes for all 12 months of the year.

Nationally, the arson rate was 36.9 per 100,000 in population in the year 2000. Cities with populations 250,000 to 499,999 reported the highest arson rate at 69.5 per 100,000 inhabitants. As a group, cities reported a rate

Table 2.31

### Arson Rate

by Population Group, 2000

[8,023 agencies; 2000 estimated population 178,312,083; rate per 100,000 inhabitants]

Population group	Rate
Total	36.9
Total cities	40.3
Group I (cities 250,000 and over)	67.2
(cities 1,000,000 and over)	65.7
(cities 500,000 to 999,999)	67.0
(cities 250,000 to 499,999)	69.5
Group II (cities 100,000 to 249,999)	40.4
Group III (cities 50,000 to 99,999)	31.0
Group IV (cities 25,000 to 49,999)	26.3
Group V (cities 10,000 to 24,999)	19.3
Group VI (cities under 10,000)	24.0
Suburban counties	33.9
Rural counties	17.7
Suburban area	27.4

of 40.3 per 100,000 population. Suburban counties registered a rate of 33.9 and rural counties 17.7 arsons per 100,000 inhabitants.

By region, the West reported the highest arson rate with 39.5 offenses per 100,000 population. Following were the Midwest with 39.1, the South with 35.5, and the Northeast with 31.6 arsons per 100,000 inhabitants.

## Nature

In 2000, the most frequently reported arsons, which comprise 43.8 percent of all incidents reported, were arsons of structures. Mobile properties (motor vehicles, trailers, etc.) were the target of 31.2 percent of reported arson offenses, and other types of properties (crops, timber, etc.) accounted for the remaining 25.0 percent of arsons. (See Table 2.32.)

When reviewing structural arsons only, residential property arsons comprised 60.3 percent, with 42.2 percent of structural arsons directed at single-family dwellings. Property that was either uninhabited or abandoned at the time of the arson accounted for 18.2 percent of structure-related arsons.

Motor vehicles comprised the overwhelming majority of mobile property arsons, with 95 percent of the total in that category.

The average estimated monetary value of property damaged due to reported arsons in 2000 was \$11,042 per incident. On the whole, the average loss for all types of structures was \$19,479. Mobile property loss averaged \$5,803 per incident, and for other properties targeted, losses averaged \$2,706. (See Table 2.32.)

Table 2.32

**Arson**

by Type of Property, 2000

[11,903 agencies; 2000 estimated population 213,171,039]

Property classification	Number of offenses	Percent distribution <sup>1</sup>	Percent not in use	Average damage	Total clearances	Percent cleared <sup>2</sup>	Percent under 18
Total	68,756	100.0		\$11,042	11,344	16.5	45.0
Total structure:	30,116	43.8	18.2	19,479	6,637	22.0	44.6
Single occupancy residential	12,715	18.5	21.8	17,998	2,856	22.5	35.5
Other residential	5,447	7.9	13.1	18,081	1,181	21.7	37.3
Storage	2,249	3.3	19.3	10,727	408	18.1	60.3
Industrial/manufacturing	354	0.5	22.0	136,134	164	46.3	43.9
Other commercial	3,200	4.7	14.9	37,695	509	15.9	36.0
Community/public	3,622	5.3	10.5	12,572	1,059	29.2	72.9
Other structure	2,529	3.7	24.5	8,759	460	18.2	49.6
Total mobile:	21,442	31.2		5,803	1,528	7.1	23.5
Motor vehicles	20,396	29.7		5,516	1,360	6.7	20.8
Other mobile	1,046	1.5		11,387	168	16.1	45.2
Other	17,198	25.0		2,706	3,179	18.5	56.2

<sup>1</sup> Because of rounding, the percentages may not add to total.<sup>2</sup> Includes offenses cleared by arrest or exceptional means.**Law Enforcement Response**

Nationally in 2000, the arson clearance rate was 16.5 percent. The highest clearance rate, 28.5 percent, was recorded in cities under 10,000 in population, and all cities as a group cleared 15.5 percent of all arsons. In the same time period, rural counties registered a 24.2-percent clearance rate and suburban counties reported a 15.9-percent clearance rate. (See Table 25.)

When reviewing arson clearances in the Nation's regions, the Southern States reported a clearance rate of 17.9 percent. The Northeastern States had a 16.6-percent rate, the Midwestern States registered a 14.6-percent rate, and the Western States a 14.4-percent rate of arson clearances.

Juvenile involvement in arson is higher than for any other Index crime, with 45.0 percent of all 2000 arson clearances involving only juveniles (persons under age 18). When considering arson types, juveniles comprised 23.5 percent of clearances for mobile property arson, 44.6 percent of structural arson clearances, and 56.2 percent of clearances of arsons for all other property. (See Table 2.32.)

In the nation's cities collectively, 49.4 percent of arson clearances were attributed to juvenile offenders. In suburban counties, juveniles accounted for 38.7 percent of arson clearances. Juveniles were involved in 29.6 percent of clearances in rural counties. (See Table 28.)

A breakdown of clearances by type of structural and mobile classifications is provided in Table 2.32. These data were constructed from detailed information provided by 11,903 law enforcement agencies that submitted supplementary arson data. The highest clearance rates for arsons were those of industrial/manufacturing structures, 46.3 percent. The lowest clearance rates, 6.7 percent, were for motor vehicles.

In 2000, 84.9 percent of the estimated 16,530 persons arrested for arson in the United States were male. Persons under 18 years of age made up 52.8 percent of the arrestees and 71.6 percent were under 25. Whites comprised 76.4 percent of arrestees and blacks accounted for 21.7 percent, with the remainder being made up of persons of other races.

Nationally, arson arrests declined 4.3 percent in 2000 as compared to those in 1999. By community type, suburban counties recorded an 8.9-percent decrease in arson arrests, rural counties registered a 4.2-percent decline, and cities as a group recorded a 3.1-percent decrease.

In 2000 adult arrests decreased 0.9-percent when compared to the previous year's figures. Juvenile arrests declined by 7.0 percent. Arrests of males for arson fell by 5.3 percent in 2000, and arrests of females rose by 1.9 percent during the same time period.

Five- and 10-year trends in arson arrests show a drop of 15.6 percent in total arrests when compared to 1996 totals and a 16.0-percent decline from the 1991 figure.