

TEXAS ADVISORY COUNCIL ON **ARSON**

Arson Hotline Donations Needed

The good news is that phone calls into the Texas Arson Hotline are picking up, but unfortunately funding remains dismally low.

Anonymous calls to the Arson Hotline have resulted in 11 arrests/warrants in the past 18 months. Awards have ranged from \$150 to \$595 and the anonymous callers have collected approximately \$2,300 for the information they have provided to fire investigators.

David Mitchell, president of A Texas Advisory Council on Arson (ATAC) that oversees the funding for the Arson Hotline, says insurers need to step up and pledge donations so that arsonists will know they are being watched and reported.

“ATAC provided the initial seed money for the Arson Hotline. Additional funds came from State Farm, the North Texas IASIU and the Insurance Council of Texas,” said Mitchell. “The Arson Hotline started off with about \$5,000 in funds to pay informants for their tips that led to arrests. Our fund is now down to \$2,660 and that won’t last long at our current success rate. We really need help now.”

Operators take Arson Hotline calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Each helpful call is relayed to the State Fire Marshal’s Office (SFMO) who relays pertinent information to local authorities investigating the fires. Mark Lockerman, SFMO director of fire investigations, said most of the Arson Hotline calls have led directly to the arrests of arson suspects.

“In most of the cases, we would not have made any arrests if it had not been for the calls to the Arson Hotline,” said Lockerman. “There is no better evidence than having the arson suspect pointed out. The suspects tend to confess a lot quicker.”

The ATAC group recently distributed to fire departments around the state more than 600 bumper stickers that display the Arson Hotline toll-free number, which is 1-877- 4 FIRE 45. Mitchell said having the Arson Hotline number on the back of emergency fire vehicles should generate more calls and he’s worried about what money is left in the bank.

“ATAC membership fees don’t come close to providing the money we will need to keep the Arson Hotline operating,” Mitchell said. “We need the financial support of the insurance industry to further the Arson Hotline’s success. Any donations, large or small are welcome.”

Please send your checks to: ATAC on Arson Hotline in care of the Insurance Council of Texas, 2801 S. IH 35, Austin, Texas 78741. The Insurance Council of Texas maintains ATAC’s Web site, administrative duties and public relations. For additional information about ATAC on Arson, the Arson Hotline or ATAC membership, point your browser to www.ataconarson.org.

The next ATAC meeting will be held June 5 at Wilhoittes Restaurant in Grapevine from 9:30 a.m. until 1 p.m. If you are not a member, but would like to attend, please contact ICT’s Mark Hanna as space is limited.