

Profiling Arson and Fire Death

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Arson is a Very Personal Crime

- **In most cases (80%+) involving arson, the victim of the attack knows the suspect.**
- **It is very similar to murder!**

Victimology

- Why was the target or person attacked?
- The **victim's lifestyle** is the most important factor to consider as to why and how they became a target.
- This holds true with murder victim's as well

Survivability

- The **victim's health** is the most important factor that determines whether they will or will not survive a fire.

Murder Victims

- The overwhelming number of murder victims in the United States live a **lifestyle that is high risk** or directly leads to their death.
- Involved in drugs or gangs
- In a relationship with an abusive/dangerous person
- Are somewhat **defenseless/dependent /alone**
- **Risky Behavior**

6 Common Victims of Serial Killers

- The elderly or infirm-(dependent/alone)
 - Young children, babies, infants(dependent/alone)
 - Gay/Trans men engaged in risky behavior-(risky)
 - Prostitutes-(risky/alone)
 - Young teen Runaways/Hitchhikers-(risky/alone)
 - Homeless
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- -All groups are either vulnerable/dependent or engaged in high risk lifestyle where they are **separated from safety net** of family or friends

Common Targets of Serial Arsonists

- Vegetation/Trees
- Trash cans/dumpsters
- Discarded Materials
- Sheds, Outbuildings
- Vacant Properties
- Wild Land
- Very similar to human targets-these are items that are alone (empty), defenseless, or not being monitored
- They are **easy to access** without risk to arsonist

Understanding Arson Motives

- **Spite/Revenge- roughly 40% of all arsons**
- **Financial Gain-roughly 40%**
- Crime Concealment
- Vandalism/Juvenile Fire setting
- Extremism
- Excitement Based- least common

Major Arson Sub-types

- **Goal Oriented:** The arsonist set the fire with a clear goal or purpose in mind. The arsonist can have multiple goals intermixed. There is a connection between arsonist and target.
- **Most Common sub-type**
- **Emotionally Based:** No known connection between the arsonist and target.
- The arsonist set the fire for no obvious reason or goal.
- Fairly rare

Major Arson Sub-types

Goal Oriented Arson

- Financial Gain
- Spite-Revenge
- Crime Concealment
- Extremist Based
- Gang/Organized Crime
- Vandalism

Emotionally Based Arson

- Excitement Based
- Some Juvenile Arson
- Some Serial Arson
- Crazy person attacking a random target**

Target Analysis

- The most important aspect of understanding the motive for arson.
- To understand the **motive**, the investigator must identify the exact **target** of the attack.

Ignition Scenario Analysis

- **Ignition Scenario:** The exact materials, steps, and methods by which the arsonist started the fire.
- To understand the sophistication of the suspect, the investigator must study the **sophistication of the Ignition Scenario.**

Sophistication Level

- After careful analysis of the **target, the motive, and the ignition scenario**, then the investigator can determine the sophistication level of the offender
- A highly sophisticated ignition scenario points to a very narrow field of potential suspects

M.O. vs Signature

- **M.O. (method of operation)** is everything a suspect does to successfully complete a crime.
- M.O.s can and do evolve as the suspect matures and becomes more efficient
- **Signature**-something done at a crime scene that is completely unnecessary to complete the crime, but fulfills a psychological need of the criminal.
- **Almost non-existent in arson**
- Normally found in sexual homicides

Signature example: Unabomber Ted Kaczinsky

- Placed the letters “FC” somewhere on everyone of his bombs and letters to police.
- Only Kaczinsky knew what the letters stood for

Fire Death Investigations

- All fire deaths should be treated as **unknown/suspicious events** until thoroughly investigated by:
 - Homicide Investigator
 - Coroner/M.E.
 - Fire/Arson Investigator

Fire Death

- The vast number of fire deaths are **accidental events**
- Most people who die due to fire are in a **residential setting.**

Fire Death Scenarios

- Accidental fire/death
- Intentional fire, then unintentional death-ie. firefighter death
- Suicide by fire
- Murder, then a fire is set to conceal the crime
- **Murder by fire-rare**

Fire Death Victimology

- The victim's **lifestyle and health** are the main reasons why they die as a result of fire
- The average healthy person should survive fire unless:
 - incapacitated, aged, infirm or ill
 - very young (baby, toddler)
 - living in sub-standard housing

Survival

- **Fire is a slow weapon**
- **People in good health, young, ambulatory and living in standard housing should be able to survive fires.**
- **It should be considered highly suspicious is healthy, ambulatory people die in fires**

Who dies in fires?

- **Elderly**
- **Unhealthy**
- **Poor**
- **Mental Health Issues**
- **Alcoholics**
- **Drug Addicts/Users**
- **Babies/Children**
- **Homeless**
- **People living in substandard housing or conditions**
- **Firefighters**

Main Cause of Death in a Fire

- **The leading cause of death during a fire is by Asphyxiation through the inhalation of smoke and carbon monoxide.**

Why people die in fires

- Incapacitated by injury, drugs, alcohol
- Unfamiliar with location
- Unable to flee-jail, hospital, etc
- Non-ambulatory-poor health
- Pack rat lifestyle-conditions

Fire Death Scene Documentation

- Normal Origin and Cause Documentation
- **Detailed Photos of victim, clothing, injuries, and area under victim**
- Exits, escape routes,
- Fire detection systems
- Deceased pets
- Medications, alcohol
- Document any pertinent lifestyle or health issues-Oxygen equipment, wheelchairs, etc

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