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City Club of Portland (Portland, Or.)

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Information Report on
ARSON IN PORTLAND

To the Board of Governors,
The City Club of Portland:

I. INTRODUCTION

Of all major crimes, arson may be the most visible, in terms of the number of people who see its effects. A burning house, apartment building or warehouse draws a crowd of onlookers from the first wail of a siren until the last flicker of an ember. There is no similar crowd, however, to witness the subsequent insurance payment and its effect on rates, or the loss to local tax rolls of the affected property. There may have been hundreds who watched the flames lick through windows, but no one to recall the suspicious events that may have preceded the blaze.

For many reasons, arson is one of the most difficult crimes to determine, much less prosecute. Public perception of the problem may be limited to vague stereotypes of "firebugs" or dimly recalled features of a television detective show. That perception is changing, however.

Arson by many accounts is now the fastest-growing crime in America, reaching "epidemic" proportions in some areas. Nationwide, arson causes some 700 deaths a year, and results in an estimated \$1.3 billion in losses.¹ The grim picture of block after block of burned-out buildings in many major cities has stirred the interest of government, industry, and individuals.

Anti-arson programs are functioning effectively in a number of cities, while government agencies and the insurance industry issue a flood of information on identifying and combating the problem. The anti-arson efforts of the city of Seattle and state of Washington have been cited by some as models for the nation, prompting questions about whether Portland is doing all it can to address the issue.

In recognition of this increased national awareness of arson, the Board of Governors of the City Club of Portland authorized a Committee to be formed to examine four charges:

- the magnitude of arson in Portland and its effects on the community;
- the efforts of local public agencies and insurance companies to combat arson;
- the efforts of other cities to fight arson, and the applicability of those methods locally; and
- the desirability of an anti-arson program in Portland.

Your Committee interviewed people in a variety of fields directly or indirectly concerned with arson. We also spoke with knowledgeable individuals in other cities, and collected information from numerous local and national sources.

In the course of its research, your Committee reached the conclusion that, based on its interviews and the available information, arson does

¹ Statement by Gordon Vickery, administrator of U.S. Fire Administration, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, March 27, 1980.

not appear to be a major problem in Portland at this time. While arson is a crime that certainly demands the attention of both public officials and citizens, your Committee does not feel it is a problem that warrants major new programs or expenditures.

Although this report contains no formal recommendations, your Committee nevertheless wished to have it published in order to inform the membership and the citizens of Portland of our findings.

II. BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

A. Arson: A Complex Crime

A number of factors make arson more complex and difficult to solve than many other major crimes. The most obvious problem is that much of the evidence is consumed by the crime itself, the fire. Although investigators have sophisticated methods of assessing the cause of a fire, it is still a long step from determining there was arson to learning who was responsible for it. There seldom are eyewitnesses to the crime, and it is rarely perpetrated in the presence of the victim. In some cases, it is even one of the rare crimes that is committed against oneself (i.e., burning one's business).

Arson is also different in that it crosses more jurisdictional boundaries than most other crimes. As a federal fire official told Congress, "The responsibility for stopping arson rests with several agencies. Coordination among firefighters, police prosecutors, insurance and banking representatives, municipal officials and community groups is critical in solving the problem. Arson is a crime that crosses organizational boundaries."²

That list also could include "the public." Firefighters and prosecutors alike told your Committee that public awareness and a willingness to become involved were essential to reduce arson.

Experts interviewed by your Committee said that motives for arson fall into five principal categories: 1) the "hatred" or revenge fire; 2) crimes committed by mentally ill persons or "pyromaniacs;" 3) vandalism, usually by juveniles; 4) "arson for profit," committed mainly by individuals who set fire to their own property in order to collect insurance or for other financial gain; and 5) those cases of "arson for profit" in which a professional arsonist, or "torch" is hired.

A nationally recognized forensic psychologist, who has made an extensive study of arsonists, told a member of your Committee that there is nothing in the psychological profile of an arsonist to distinguish him from persons capable of other psychopathic or sociopathic behavior. Beyond generalizing that an arsonist suffers from psychological or emotional disorders likely to lead to anti-social behavior of some kind, no sound criteria exist to identify a person as a risk other than previously exhibited arson behavior.³

2. Statement by Gordon Vickery, op. cit.

3. Dr. Parke Elliot Dietz, Harvard University.

B. Problems with Data

Statistical guidelines are needed to compare Portland's arson rates with those in other cities. However, there appear to be no firm nationwide standards on what constitutes an "incident" of arson. There are distinctions, for example, between incidents reported and incidents investigated, as well as incidents "closed" by arrest or identification of the arsonist. Some cities include juvenile firesetters, others do not. And the number of incidents is not related to property damage, loss of life, or degree of premeditation of the arsonist.

Thus, statistics give no clue whether the arsonist is a mentally ill pyromaniac or a scheming property owner. Nor are there distinctions drawn according to the seriousness of the fire; a fire in a trash can is counted the same as a fire in an apartment building. Another indication of the difficulty of comparing figures is the fact that the Seattle Fire Department investigates fires only with losses of more than \$1,000 (and is thinking of raising that minimum), while Portland investigates all fires, of whatever loss.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has only recently included arson as a "major," Class I crime -- and that inclusion so far is only temporary. (Other crimes in that category are murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft.) At best, the FBI's annual Uniform Crime Reports include statistics on arson only for 1978-80, and figures are not complete in many cases.

What FBI figures are available might indicate Portland has a problem with arson, relative to other major West Coast cities. The 1979 data show that of 19 West Coast cities, Portland ranked fourth in the rate-per-1,000 population in arson incidence, and fifth in the rate of increase between 1978 and 1979. The 1980 figures, however, reinforce your Committee's concerns with how the data are collected, since the totals for some cities are identical to the previous year's report while others are sharply different. Moreover, the FBI only takes the statistics reported to it by local law enforcement agencies, thus formalizing the haphazard pattern of reporting standards applied to arson from city to city. In short, the FBI statistics are insufficient for the purpose of drawing valid conclusions.

Your Committee apparently is not alone in facing this problem with data. The January 1979 report of Oregon's Task Force on Fire Cause and Arson Investigation noted, "Almost all of the authoritative statements concerning the arson problem at the national level contain a statement regarding the lack of factual, broad-based data." As a result, the report said, estimates on the seriousness of arson "are not consistent" and are "based on incomplete data."

Your Committee has greater confidence in the statistics provided by fire departments in Portland and Seattle, because we were able to ask questions on how those figures are assembled. In addition, your Committee was told (albeit by Oregonians) that Oregon is a leader nationwide in fire reporting, having maintained a statewide fire reporting system since 1966.

C. Statistical Comparisons

Despite the qualifications noted above, your Committee believed it would be useful to make some comparisons of arson rates. Based on data collected from local fire departments, the FBI Uniform Crime Reports for 1979 and 1980 and the U.S. Census figures for 1980, your Committee estimates the arson rate in five major West Coast cities for 1980 (or fiscal 1979-80) as:

<u>CITY</u>	<u>INCIDENTS OF ARSON</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>	<u>RATE PER 1,000</u>
Los Angeles	7,594	2,966,763	2.56
San Jose	1,612	636,550	2.53
Portland	361	366,383	.98
Seattle	422	493,846	.85
San Francisco	478	678,974	.70

Annual reports of the Portland Fire Bureau show that the number of arson fires declined through the 1970s, and that year-to-year fluctuations in the figures make it very difficult to draw a conclusion from any one-year change.

The number of fires investigated under the category of "arson, probable arson, threatened arson and attempted arson" in Portland were:

1975-76	594
1976-77	554
1977-78	463
1978-79	346
1979-80	361

While one could accurately note a four percent increase between 1978-79 and 1979-80, the more compelling observation is the decline of 39 percent between 1975-76 and 1979-80.

Statistics from the Seattle Fire Department lead to a similar conclusion. There, the number of arson incidents was:

1976	584
1977	520
1978	456
1979	494
1980	422

At no time has Portland experienced the dramatically sharp increases in the number of arson incidents that have prompted many other cities to undertake major anti-arson efforts. Over the last several years, arson has remained the cause of roughly 20 percent of the fires in Portland. It is the largest single cause of fires, trailed slightly by smoker's carelessness, miscellaneous "human elements" and miscellaneous non-human elements.

Dollar loss and deaths are two other ways to measure the seriousness of arson. The dollar-loss figures reported by the Portland Fire Bureau for fires categorized as "arson, probable arson and undetermined

suspicious," as well as dollar loss from all fires:

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>ARSON LOSS</u>	<u>ALL LOSSES</u>	<u>ARSON AS A PERCENTAGE</u>
1975-76	\$2,242,994	\$6,177,190	36.3
1976-77	2,530,482	5,644,359	44.8
1977-78	2,573,070	7,735,822	33.2
1978-79	1,716,269	9,975,361	17.2
1979-80	2,511,615	11,923,974	21.0

Your Committee hesitates to give much weight to dollar loss as an indication of the seriousness of arson, except to note that it is one measure of the loss the community as a whole suffers through lost taxes and wages. Dollar loss is affected by several factors, including how soon the fire is detected, the response time of fire units, whether the building was sprinklered, how the building was constructed, and what it contained. One incident of arson could result in, say, \$500,000 or \$1 million damage. Conversely, 100 incidents of arson could result in a total loss of only \$10,000.

Any loss of life, of course, is a high price. Deaths from fires of all kinds in Portland have generally run between 12 and 25 a year over the past decade. One fatality was attributed by the Fire Bureau to arson in 1979 and none was reported in several years previous to that. The most striking example of the potential human toll from arson came on July 7, 1975, when an arson-caused fire in the Burnside-area Pomona Hotel resulted in 12 deaths.

D. Portland and Arson

How is it that Portland has escaped what has been a major problem for cities such as New York, Boston and San Francisco?

There are several possible reasons. First, Portland does not have the large stock of old, decaying or abandoned buildings that have been the seedbed for rampant arson in many large American cities, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest.

Moreover, many of Portland's old buildings have been the target not of arson-for-profit, but of renovation and adaptive use. Progressive attitudes and policies adopted by city government -- as well as the foresight and initiative of private citizens and business people -- have helped keep the city an attractive place. As a result, some witnesses suggested, people who might have had incentives to burn their buildings in other cities have seen reasons to maintain and upgrade them in Portland.

The quality of Portland's police and fire bureaus cannot be discounted, either. Although the Committee initially sensed a somewhat complacent attitude toward arson among some Portland Fire Bureau officials interviewed, this might merely be a reflection of well-placed confidence that the situation is under control.

For example, many cities have established arson task forces in the face of a rising problem. Many of these task forces have included features such as greater police-fire bureau cooperation, as well as increased contact between fire inspectors and city agencies aware of build-

ings that may be potential arson targets.⁴

Both these elements have been instituted in Portland without prompting of crisis. For several years, two Portland Police Bureau detectives have been assigned to the Fire Bureau in order to strengthen arson investigations and a third was recently added. In addition, fire investigators are also full-fledged police officers.

The problem of abandoned buildings is dealt with in Portland on a regular basis, and the city Bureau of Buildings and the Fire Bureau appear to have a good working relationship. The city's dangerous buildings ordinance is frequently invoked to demolish abandoned or heavily damaged buildings judged to be safety hazards. This not only removes potential targets of arson, but also helps prevent cases in which a building may be burned again and again.

E. Prosecution

The maximum penalty for arson in Oregon can range from one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine to 20 years in prison and a \$2,500 fine. The difference lies both in the mental state of the arsonist and the type of structure burnt.

For example, "recklessly" starting a fire is a Class A misdemeanor (the least serious offense). Intentionally starting a fire in any structure is a Class C felony carrying a maximum five-year prison term. Intentionally burning a forest or residence is a Class A felony (the most serious offense).

As noted earlier, arson suspects are difficult to identify. Nationwide, your Committee was told by several witnesses, an arrest rate of around 10 percent for adult arson cases is considered good. This is approximately the rate in Portland. (Some jurisdictions will report much higher arrest or "clearance" rates, but those usually include cases in which juveniles are involved. Juvenile fire-setters are apprehended or identified at a much higher rate, and their "crimes" are generally of a less-serious nature.)

The low arrest rate for arson cases compares nationwide to such figures as: bank robberies, 85 percent; murders, 70 percent; rapes, 48 percent; and, burglaries, 13 percent. As with many other crimes, the chance of a professional arsonist being caught is very low.

Even if a suspect is arrested, successful prosecution is by no means certain. Indeed, there seems to exist a degree of strain between prosecutors and fire officials in a good many cities. In general, firefighters complain that prosecutors are too reluctant to take on arson

4. In San Francisco, for example, a grant from the U.S. Fire Administration led to development of a program to identify all the public (and some private) records that could be used to identify or predict arson-for-profit cases. Relevant information such as building code violations, previous fires, ownership and tax records are computerized, as is the fire dispatch system. When a fire is called in, the computer can instantly provide a "red flag" that the structure in question may be an arson target. Investigators can then be on the scene faster than normal.

cases, while prosecutors complain that fire investigators do not bring adequate evidence to justify prosecution. This is one reason many arson task forces have made it a high priority to have a single prosecutor designated for arson cases.

Your Committee's research indicates that the prosecution of arson cases in Portland differs little from prosecution of other crimes, in the sense that similar procedures are followed. The Multnomah County District Attorney's office generally has from six to eight arson cases pending at any one time, totalling 30 to 40 cases a year, with a conviction rate of from 70 to 90 percent.

With the District Attorney's office divided into several units, each assigned a group of crimes, arson must vie with several other categories of crime for the attention of prosecutors. Likewise, vigorous and effective prosecution of arson cases is affected by budgetary and staff shortages seen in county and other levels of government.

Several factors are cited for the small number of prosecutions relative to the incidence of arson:

- in about half the cases, there are no suspects;
- in many other cases, there is not enough objective evidence;
- witnesses often have moved or are not credible; and
- most evidence in arson cases is generally circumstantial, and eyewitnesses are rare.

Current and past employees of the District Attorney's office said they believe the Fire and Police bureaus do an adequate job in regard to arson; in fact, much better than in the past. They attributed this to increased police assistance in arson investigation, as well as additional training for all arson investigators. Some criticism was expressed, however, that arson investigators often lack the necessary expertise in interviewing witnesses or suspects.

Once arson prosecutions reach the courts, local judges seem to consider arson a very serious offense. After convicted arsonists are released from incarceration, however, there are few, if any, programs to help them. Again, this situation is not much different from that of other crimes.

F. Public Education

One area in which Portland does seem behind other cities is in its effort to inform the public about arson.

While many cities have vigorous publicity campaigns intended to raise citizens' awareness about arson and what can be done to prevent it, the Portland Fire Bureau appears to mention arson only when asked.

This is not to say that the Fire Bureau does not have an active campaign of public education about fire. It just does not include arson as a major element. Fire Bureau personnel annually visit every school in the Portland School District, talking with pupils in kindergarten through grade four about fire safety. Arson is mentioned "on a small scale."²

5. Donald Mayer, Public Education Officer, Portland Fire Bureau.

The problem of arson has not been ignored on the official level, however. In 1977, then-Governor Bob Straub established a Task Force on Fire Cause and Arson Investigation. Its final report was issued in January 1979. Among its recommendations were passage of a so-called "arson insurance immunity bill" to give insurance companies greater freedom to exchange information with fire investigators on possible arson cases, and establishment of an awards system for citizens reporting arson crimes. The task force's report appeared at a time of transition in the governor's office, however, and its impact was diminished. The 1979 legislature failed to pass that bill, and the idea of an awards system went nowhere.

A second task force was established in late 1980 for the purpose of reviewing the recommendations of the first task force and looking at new goals. That second task force completed its work in November 1981, recommending improvements in public awareness efforts, statewide reporting of arson cases, training of prosecutors, and cooperation between involved agencies. It also established an arson awards program, with funding from insurance companies. In addition, the 1981 legislature did pass a form of insurance arson immunity bill (described in more detail in Section II. J. Insurance).

The chairman of the second task force described the most important elements in attacking arson as "communication, cooperation and coordination" between involved public agencies and private interests. The most important element, she added, is the need to raise public awareness of the issue.⁶

G. Juvenile Fire-Setters

While much of the attention to arson has been focused on adults, particularly on arson-for-profit schemes, juvenile arsonists are a factor in the problem. The FBI reported that in 1979, 49 percent of all persons arrested for arson were under age 18. That figure is similar to the situation in Portland, where the Fire Bureau reported 19 juveniles arrested for arson in 1979-80, versus 38 adults. A total of 139 incidents classified as "juveniles with fire" were reported in the same time period by the Fire Bureau, although not all of those cases were considered arson.

The Portland School District does not report a serious problem with student-caused arson. Seventy-one fires of all kinds were reported in district buildings in the 1980-81 school year, compared to 62 the year before. Of the 71 fires last year, all but two were considered "very minor." One of those two major fires (at Clinton Kelly School) was arson-caused, but the person apprehended was not a student.

Despite the relatively minor nature of most student-set fires on school property (banners, trash cans, last-day pranks), District officials do take a serious approach to the matter, particularly at the elementary level. Students identified as fire-setters are arrested by school police and referred to the courts. The Fire Bureau is also advised of all incidents, as well as of student fire-setters.⁷

6. Blanche Schroeder, Chairman, Task Force on Fire Cause and Arson Investigation

7. Phyllis Sandy, Chief of Police, Portland School District.

H. Arson Programs Elsewhere

Special task forces on arson have been established in many cities and states around the country as a way to fight the problem. These task forces vary widely, but among their common elements are the cooperation of several affected agencies, and the active participation of high-level public officials.

1. Seattle

The Seattle task force, which has received much publicity, was formed after arson losses in that city increased from \$600,000 in 1971 to \$3.2 million in 1973. Formed in 1974 largely at the instigation of the fire chief, the task force was made up of representatives of the fire and police departments, prosecutor's office, insurance industry, sheriff's office, chamber of commerce and public safety committee. Each agency had a specific function and contribution to make.

Involvement of the prosecutor's office was particularly important. One assistant prosecutor was designated to handle all arson cases, instead of spreading them among other assistants.

Another important aspect of the Seattle plan was an active public relations campaign, including contests, billboards, and public service announcements using well-known professional athletes.

While the Seattle task force has rightfully been cited as a pioneering effort, it is interesting to note that the task force itself no longer exists, although elements of it have been incorporated into participating agencies. The responsibility for monitoring programs has been turned back to the fire department, with the insurance industry helping carry out the public information campaign.

Washington also has a statewide arson hotline, monitored by the Seattle Fire Department, that receives about 90 calls a year. It does not appear to be a major asset in fighting arson.

2. San Francisco

San Francisco's arson task force was set up in 1977 after an 800 percent increase in arson fires between 1964 and 1977. The task force is made up of representatives of the police and fire departments, district attorney's office and representatives of city hall.

The San Francisco effort is also heavily involved in public education. It has a program for juvenile fire-setters in cooperation with the public schools. The program uses a "big-brother" approach in which a firefighter is assigned to a young fire-setter to show him around the fire department and educate him on the effects of fire.

The fire department also works with neighborhood associations and a committee of business representatives, as well as providing speakers and brochures.

3. Massachusetts

Perhaps the nation's most complex task force is in Massachusetts. It is made up of representatives of seven fire departments and law enforcement agencies from cities in eastern Massachusetts, as well as 14 representatives of various state agencies. Members also include two city officials from Boston, 10 representatives of professional associations, four officials of insurance companies and banks, 13 representatives of private non-profit community agencies, and federal agency officials.

The task force is formed into three committees, each with about 20 members, that focus on different aspects of the arson problem: economic and government factors; motivation and psychological factors; and investigative capability.

4. Other Cities

In Dallas, Texas, the task force is made up of representatives of the fire department and insurance industry.

New York City's task force is similar to the one in Seattle, and is headed by the deputy mayor for criminal justice.

New Haven, Connecticut, began its task force under the leadership of the mayor, with representatives of the fire and police departments and an outside consulting firm. Later, representatives of the insurance and banking industries were added to wage an effective campaign against arson in decaying neighborhoods.

In the task force programs that have been most successful, a major factor has been the cooperation -- and often the active involvement -- of the mayor's office.

5. Effectiveness

Reports from these and other cities generally indicate improvement in various statistics relating to arson. Seattle and San Francisco, for example, reported decreased incidents and dollar losses from arson following organization of their task forces, as well as increased arrest rates. New York City and Dallas, Texas, also reported decreased incidents of arson. Other cities cited no statistics, but mentioned increases in the number of investigators or prosecutors, expanded public information campaigns, and success in obtaining money for additional personnel, equipment or programs. It should be noted again, however, that the incidence of arson in Portland has declined over the past decade, without such a formal task force. The experience of one city cannot, then, always be copied in another -- with arson, or with any other civic problem.

I. The Federal Role

Several federal agencies are also involved in fighting arson. The FBI operates a special arson program aimed at the investigation and prosecution of large-scale arson problems, such as those involving organized crime. It also provides training in arson prosecution, collects data on arson incidents and operates a laboratory.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms investigates arson cases that involve explosive devices. It also assists local law enforcement strike forces, cooperates with the Justice Department in prosecution, and provides training and laboratory assistance.

The U.S. Fire Administration coordinates federal assistance in arson prevention and control. It also conducts training programs in arson detection, has developed a municipal early-warning system for predicting and preventing arson, compiles nationwide statistics, helps states and communities develop their own arson data systems and promotes the establishment of arson task forces. The agency offers a vast amount of printed material on anti-arson efforts at all levels of government.⁸

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is concerned with housing policies relative to arson prevention, and works with neighborhood organizations in establishing local arson control projects.

The Federal Insurance Administration, U.S. Postal Service, Internal Revenue Service and U.S. Forest Service also deal with various aspects of arson.

J. Insurance

The insurance industry has been a focal point in the nationwide discussion of arson. Insurance money is frequently the aim of arson-for-profit schemes, and some persons involved in combating arson have criticized companies for being too quick to pay claims. Some have suggested that the insurance industry is itself a part of the arson problem, by taking an attitude of "we can just raise the premiums" toward arson losses.

Your Committee found no evidence that such criticism is warranted on any broad scale. Quite the contrary, the insurance industry -- through both trade organizations and many individual companies -- has been active in developing anti-arson programs and disseminating information about them.

Insurers often find themselves in a difficult position with arson cases. Unless solid evidence of a crime is available, the insurer must settle the claim in a relatively short amount of time, usually about two weeks. This necessity for prompt action often runs counter to the methodical procedures that under-staffed investigators and prosecutors must follow in developing a case. Moreover, investigators have been hampered by the insurance companies' reluctance (for fear of lawsuits from policyholders) to turn over information they might have leading to suspicion of arson.

8. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (Washington, D.C. 20472) is the primary source of information relating to arson control. Among its publications are a regular "Arson Resource Exchange Bulletin," a comprehensive "Arson Resource Directory," and publications on how to set up an arson task force. A major source of information from the insurance industry is the Insurance Committee for Arson Control (20 N. Wacker Drive, Chicago, Ill. 60606). Material collected by your Committee is available in the City Club office.

In Oregon, that roadblock may have been removed by the 1981 legislature when it passed Senate Bill 32, this state's version of the "arson immunity bill" promoted nationwide by anti-arson organizations. The bill, as adopted in Oregon, provides insurance companies with immunity from litigation when they turn over information on suspicious fires to authorities, providing the insurer is acting without "malice or fraud."

Although the practical results from such legislation have varied from state to state where it has been adopted, proponents hope it will increase cooperation among insurers and investigators. The desirability of such an immunity bill was almost universally mentioned by witnesses before your Committee.

Your Committee found local insurance companies generally reluctant to discuss specific information about arson incidents and losses. And at least one witness said many insurance companies were very lax in filing the required fire-loss reports with the State Fire Marshal's office.⁹

Local insurance offices have not taken a visible role in fighting arson, but that may be a reflection of the lack of stress on arson from local public agencies. In many cases, the most effective anti-arson material is provided by the insurance company's national offices. The insurance industry apparently has participated actively in the Governor's Task Force on Arson and in setting up the prospective awards program for arson information.

III. SUMMARY

Any study of a public issue runs the risk of focusing on that issue to the exclusion of other matters. Your Committee has attempted to steer clear of this by recognizing that arson is indeed a problem, but so is crime in any form and in any amount.

It is tempting to note the impressive and effective efforts of special anti-arson task forces in other cities, but any enthusiasm to duplicate such efforts must be tempered by at least two factors: 1) the realization that Portland, fortunately, does not suffer from the problem on the same scale; and 2) that any recommendation for increased public expenditure of time, personnel or money must be considered in the context of competing priorities. A recommendation on attacking arson cannot be made in blindness to the fact that this is a time of limited funding and reduced emphasis on new government programs as the solution to problems.

Based on its interviews and research, your Committee does not believe that Portland suffers a problem from arson in greater degree than any other major crime. As the data above indicated, the general trend over the past few years has been a decrease in the incidents of arson in Portland. Other major crimes, meanwhile, have increased steadily. Although the inconsistency in available data makes reliable comparisons of statistics impossible, it does not appear that Portland has a significant arson problem.

9. Lt. Fred Auger, Oregon State Police. In addition, the January 1979 report of the Governors' Arson Task Force reported deficiencies in the reporting of insurance claims for fire losses by adjusters and agents.

Your Committee believes that the existing procedures of the fire and police bureaus have been a factor in keeping arson from becoming the serious problem it has become in some other cities. Certainly, more could be done to prevent and combat arson, given unlimited resources. For example, the Fire Bureau could use more investigators, and the District Attorney's office needs a larger staff. A special task force probably could identify ways to improve arson detection and prevention. And Portland could attempt to copy other cities in establishing sophisticated, sometimes computerized, "early-warning" systems for arson.

Even if more people and money were available, however, it is not clear that arson investigation would, or should, be the first priority for the Fire Bureau. Many witnesses seemed much more concerned with issues such as retrofitting buildings with sprinklers, or strengthening building codes. Indeed, the most vigorous fight these days seems not between firefighter and arsonist, but between fire officials and building owners over how much is enough in regard to fire safety. Statewide, officials have great concerns about the vast amount of land in Oregon that is without fire protection of any kind.

These and other factors have led your Committee away from any specific recommendations. While your Committee believes it has a good knowledge of the arson situation in Portland, it does not have the benefit of a similar understanding of other crimes in the city. Absent that perspective -- and absent strong evidence that arson is a major public problem -- your Committee cannot make a compelling argument for large-scale change in the local approach to arson.

Still, it is important to remind citizens -- and especially public officials and legislators -- that arson is a complex crime to solve and prosecute, and that the success of anti-arson programs in other cities has almost always depended in large degree on the participation of high-level officials.

Public education, however, is one area where improvements could be made, and at relatively little cost, by altering existing programs to include greater mention of arson. As noted above, the Portland Fire Bureau does not place a great deal of emphasis on arson in its fire safety programs. While this may reflect the general perception that arson is not a major problem locally, your Committee believes it is as important to prevent arson as it is to prevent electrical fires or discourage buildup of oily rags or wastepaper. Although your Committee has no reason to believe that officials are ignoring arson as a potential problem, it would be tragic if complacency in either the public or private sector were to allow a crisis to flare up, endangering property and lives.

The burden is not solely on the Fire Bureau. The Police Bureau has a crime prevention program, the schools have a role to play, and major private institutions such as civic clubs and business organizations also have a stake in seeing arson contained or reduced. Portland's extensive network of neighborhood organizations and the pride most residents feel in their city also should be brought to bear.

A large and growing body of information is available from both government and private sources that could be of help in raising public awareness of arson. This information, your Committee believes, could

easily be incorporated into the network of clubs, community groups, and civic organizations whose purpose is to raise citizens' awareness of local issues. As the emphasis on "volunteerism" continues from the state and federal governments, new avenues for disseminating such information -- and doing so at little cost - should open up.

Your Committee recognizes, nonetheless, that raising public awareness of arson is only part of the larger problem of encouraging citizens to care about and become involved in all aspects of crime prevention. As the Fire Bureau's public education officer noted, "The average person does not feel they're going to have a fire. Unless it affects them personally, they're not going to give a damn."

Because it is important to place arson in the context of public awareness of crime in general, your Committee is reluctant to endorse such programs as arson hotlines or reward programs when there is not demonstrable evidence of a major problem requiring extraordinary remedies.

Citizens need to be encouraged to report their knowledge about all crimes, and to be aware of the impact criminal activity of any form has upon society. Arson does extract a price from the city and its residents. It surely is a crime to be concerned about; but it is not the only crime.

Respectfully submitted,

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Harry Christensen
P. Barton DeLacy
Robert E. Repp
Robert L. Wolf
Robert P. Michelet, Chairman

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Appendix A
PERSONS INTERVIEWED

Fred Auger, Arson Investigator, Oregon State Police
 Jeffrey Beyer, Insurance Information Institute, Seattle, Washington
 John Bradley, Senior Deputy, Multnomah County District Attorney
 Lance Caldwell, Assistant Multnomah County District Attorney
 Richard Hunke, Deputy Oregon Insurance Commissioner
 Ray Landi, Coordinator, Arson Task Force, San Francisco Fire Department
 Don Mayer, Public Education Officer, Portland Fire Bureau
 Rex Millard, Chief Arson Investigator, Portland Fire Bureau
 Gary Mingus, Ohio Casualty Company
 Mel Pittman, Building Inspector, Portland Fire Bureau
 Phyllis Sandy, Chief of Police, Portland School District
 Blanche Schroeder, Chairperson, Governor's Task Force on Arson
 Richard Stanford, Chief, Arson Investigation Unit, Seattle Fire Department
 Carl Strand, Gradey and Morey Insurance Company

Appendix B
PUBLICATIONS CONSULTED

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 "Cities unite on arson," The Oregonian. November 27, 1980.
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