

What Motivates Sneaky Arsonists?

SNEAKINESS is an element of theft, burglary and many other crimes, and it is an essential ingredient of arson.

Intentional destruction of property by burning may be committed for reasons of revenge, greed, excitement or to cover other crimes by eliminating evidence.

Blazes that destroyed major buildings at the Oklahoma City stockyards, hotel fires in Las Vegas, an Oklahoma City office building, a church sanctuary and other properties apparently involved arson.

Fire department officials have said that arson is increasing in Oklahoma and rising cost of construction is running building losses into millions of dollars annually. One spokesman said that probably one-fourth of building fires in Oklahoma City are the result of arson.

What really motivates arsonists may be akin to drives that impel individuals to take shots at presidents — not always logical.

Fire has been a thrilling sight for human beings, as well as being useful, ever since its discovery. Savage

tribes danced around fires before going out to meet their enemies in battle. They sometimes burned captives at the stake.

Sacrifices of burnt offerings on altars of worship, including children, have been observed by various religious bodies.

Jealousy and desire for revenge seem to have motivated many individuals to burn their neighbors' haystacks, ripe wheat fields or barns. Disgruntled employees have been known to set fire to buildings where they and others earned their livelihood, doing harm to all.

State forestry officials have said that deliberately set fires account for nearly two-thirds of blazes in the timber industry of southeastern Oklahoma. It seems that some people there believe burning kills ticks and snakes or causes grass to "green up" faster, but maliciousness and thrill-seeking cause others.

Not the least of motives involved in arson is that of profit, particularly where property is well insured. Insurance firms point out that such

arsonists may profit at the expense of other policy holders.

Discovery of evidence that might lead to conviction of arsonists usually requires painstaking investigation. When positive signs of arson are found, the suspect may not be found. The burner may have been accused of no other crime, and it is not uncommon for arsonists to stand by openly to watch the blazes they have set.

Arson is a primitive expression of human emotions and those who resort to it may be reverting to an uncivilized means of satisfying their personal desires.

A story from the "Depression Days" told of two merchants who passed while walking to their respective stores. "Good morning, Abe," said one. "Too bad that fire wiped out your store last night!"

"Shh-h!" the second replied. "That's not until tomorrow night."

Population is increasing and we can assume that science is making people smarter, but human nature doesn't seem to be making much progress.