

# OCT 7 Costly Fires Destroy Jobs

**F**IRES that destroy factories, businesses or homes are disasters, even when no lives are lost or persons injured.

For example, seven businesses were destroyed and four others were severely damaged in the blaze that destroyed an estimated \$1.5 million worth of property last week in a Del City shopping center.

Earlier but still recent fires have wiped out the landmark Frankoma Pottery operation at Sapulpa, a row of buildings in Sulphur, and a big retail store in Shawnee. Property losses were extensive, and employees of burned-out firms suddenly found themselves among the unemployed in communities that already had too many people not working.

Owners said the Frankoma Pottery plant will be rebuilt but it may take months to get it back into production. Probably the Sulphur and Shawnee businesses also will be reopened, but the loss of trade and payrolls may never be regained.

Unfortunately, in many instances insurance coverage is insufficient to reconstruct burned buildings. Underinsured property owners may be unpleasantly surprised to find that it may take \$500,000 to restore a building that cost \$50,000 before the war, or that a house that originally cost \$10,000 may suffer \$40,000 worth of damage.

A burn-out of buildings in downtown sections of small towns sometimes leaves lasting scars. Funds may not be available either to rebuild or to com-

pletely demolish the blackened structures. As a result they may stand for decades as grim reminders of better days, giving the community the appearance of a ghost town.

Causes of fires are not always determined, but the many that are due to defective wiring, heating or appliances, or to carelessness with flammable materials, cigarettes or open flames may be prevented.

In addition to preventable fires, businesses and home owners may be subject to the dangers of arson. Arson now ranks second only to automobile thefts in total property losses from crime. It is difficult to combat because the crime may destroy the evidence needed to identify and convict the arsonist.

In eastern Oklahoma, large tracts of timberland have been destroyed on a number of occasions by arsonists. Forestry officials have said that fully 60 percent of all fires in the prime timber country of southeastern Oklahoma are believed to be incendiary.

In western Oklahoma and elsewhere, carelessly thrown cigarettes have set off grass fires that not only destroyed pastures but the fences around them and sometimes farm buildings. Posts, wire and labor to replace fences are costly. Nor have recent rains removed the hazards of forest or prairie fires.

Fire may not always be preventable but it nearly always is a costly disaster, and often it results in human tragedy as well.