



For Immediate Release
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OXENDINE ISSUES WARNING AFTER CHURCH FIRES IN METRO AREA

Atlanta – After church arsons in Fulton and Clayton Counties recently, Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner John W. Oxendine is urging congregations to follow safety precautions to keep their place of worship safe.

“Church fires are particularly devastating because the entire neighborhood suffers a loss, especially in areas where churches are the social as well as spiritual heart of the community,” Commissioner Oxendine said. He offered the following tips for congregations concerned about church arson:

- Illuminate the exterior and all entrances. Consider the installation of motion activating lighting near doors and windows. Church grounds and walking areas should also be provided with adequate security lighting.
- Promote church watches in the neighborhood.
- Educate neighbors about recognizing any unusual activities, and encourage them to make note of strangers spending time in the area, both on foot and in vehicles. Write down license plates numbers of suspicious vehicles, and inform the proper authorities.
- Be aware that individuals may pose as service technicians to get into a church.
- Do not disclose on signs or bulletins when church facilities will not be in use.
- Keep church leaders informed of problems. Be aware of individuals who may be disgruntled or likely to cause damage to church property through arson or vandalism.

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- Open avenues of communication with local fire and law enforcement officials regarding the arson problems churches are facing.
- Keep shrubbery and trees trimmed so buildings can be observed by passing patrols.
- Consider fencing areas that are not readily visible to patrols or neighbors.
- Ladders and other devices allowing access to roof areas should be secured.
- Some churches may have basement entries that are hidden from view. These should be secured by locking ground-level doors which are operable from within the building when facilities are closed.
- Installation of a combination of burglary and fire alarm should be considered.
- Keep a current list of all individuals who have access to church keys and change the locks periodically.

Commissioner Oxendine's office and the Georgia Arson Control Board sponsor the Arson Hotline, 1-800-282-5804. Calls are taken 24 hours a day and callers may choose to remain anonymous. Rewards of up to \$10,000 are given for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of an arsonist.

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