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**For Immediate Release  
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**Portsmouth Fire Department Focuses on Combating Arson for Profit  
During National Arson Awareness Week**

Portsmouth, Virginia (May 1, 2009) -- The Portsmouth Fire Department will recognize National Arson Awareness Week, May 3<sup>rd</sup> through May 9<sup>th</sup>. The focus of this year's awareness campaign is to educate and focus public attention on the alarming statistics of 'arson for profit'.

Arson for profit schemes may take several forms, including setting a fire to reduce financial loss on a property or to receive insurance payments for a destroyed property. Regardless of the reason, intentionally set fires have a significant impact on the community including the loss of innocent lives and injuries to citizens and firefighters. Financial costs include increased insurance premiums that are passed on to citizens and local governments.

**A Local Problem**

During the last year, the Portsmouth Fire Department investigated 95 fires of suspicious origin. "Arson is always a crime that should be taken seriously. During the current state of the economy, we need to be especially vigilant in ensuring that arsonists are not benefiting financially from arson at the expense of our city and citizens," said Fire Marshal Mike Stockton.

**Protect Your Property!**

Here are several actions that you can take to help protect your property and prevent arson:

- Secure and monitor abandoned or vacant buildings
- Remove trash, debris, and combustible materials from around your home or business
- Remove or securely store flammable materials and chemicals from around your home or business
- Lock your doors and windows
- Report suspicious activity and people to local law enforcement personnel
- Support your local Neighborhood Watch program
- Illuminate the exterior and doors to your home or business
- Keep trash cans and dumpsters at least 10 feet from buildings and roof overhangs
- Lock and secure your vehicles

**You Can Help**

Arson cases are very difficult to solve. Most are solved through cooperation between citizens and investigating authorities. Citizens can help by reporting any information that could assist in the investigation of suspicious fires. Contact a member of the Fire Marshal's office at 393-8689 or call **1-888-Lock-U-Up**.

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