



# Arson Control Forum

<b>Topic</b>	'Hot Striking' after vehicle fires
<b>Organisation</b>	West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service
<b>Date</b>	15 <sup>th</sup> April 2009

## **Issue**

Some communities in the West Yorkshire area have been blighted by deliberate vehicle fires for many years. Much of this criminal activity is blatant, with those responsible acting without fear of reprisals. Residents, either through misplaced loyalty, or because they hadn't the knowledge on how to report crime without fear of repercussions had failed to react to the problem within their midst. The initiative, through the strategies detailed below, has empowered many residents to respond positively to combat this problem within their community. The project was piloted in the Leeds district starting in 2004 to try and combat the 2189 deliberate vehicle fires they were experiencing annually.

## **Actions Taken**

It was identified by the Crimestoppers organisation that some communities were reluctant to inform on offenders and that they had little understanding of the aims and procedures adopted by Crimestoppers. A poster was designed, utilising a picture of a burnt out car at a local site used for such activities. The poster was displayed on fire service vehicles to attract attention and had an immediate impact. This poster was further developed for use in community centres and other public venues including public houses.

Realising that this poster did not explain the intricacies of the Crimestopper reporting procedures, it was decided to create a leaflet, which not only replicated the poster, but also explained the Crimestopper ethos. In order to truly engage with the community, the initiative developed into 1 to 1 engagement with residents, door knocking on all houses in the immediate vicinity of a vehicle fire. This campaign of door knocking (known as Hot Striking) immediately after a car fire created a wealth of intelligence from the community, useful to both the Police and the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit. The perceived neutrality and reputation of the fire service engendered confidence in the residents

The use of the leaflet and 1 to 1 visits captured the imagination of the local multi-agency vehicle car crime group. This group promised the commitment of other agencies and staff to support the fire service in action days whereby whole communities were visited with the leaflet or specially adapted questionnaire.

The initiative was supported by a simulator which demonstrated a vehicle fire. The vehicle fire simulator, which issues smoke and flames, attracted many curious visitors when utilised in supermarket car parks and other community events. This enabled fire officers to engage with the public informally – often leading to information regarding offenders being passed to the fire service.

## **Summary of Benefits Realised**

In terms of reduction of fires, the initiative greatly contributed to reducing deliberate vehicle fires in the Leeds area from 2189 in 2003/4 to 645 in 2008/9 – a reduction of 70.5%.

The initiative also helped develop better partnership working between agencies and helped create a culture in many communities with residents willing to name those responsible for committing the offences.

Similar actions are now carried out following property and secondary fires and is contributing to significant reductions

## **Contact**

If you require any further details about the points raised in this case study, please contact:

**Name** Richard Brabbs  
**Title** Arson Task Force Co-ordinator  
**Organistaion** West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service  
**Email:** dick.brabbs@westyorksfire.gov.uk  
**Telephone:** 01274 866259 or 07810 187366