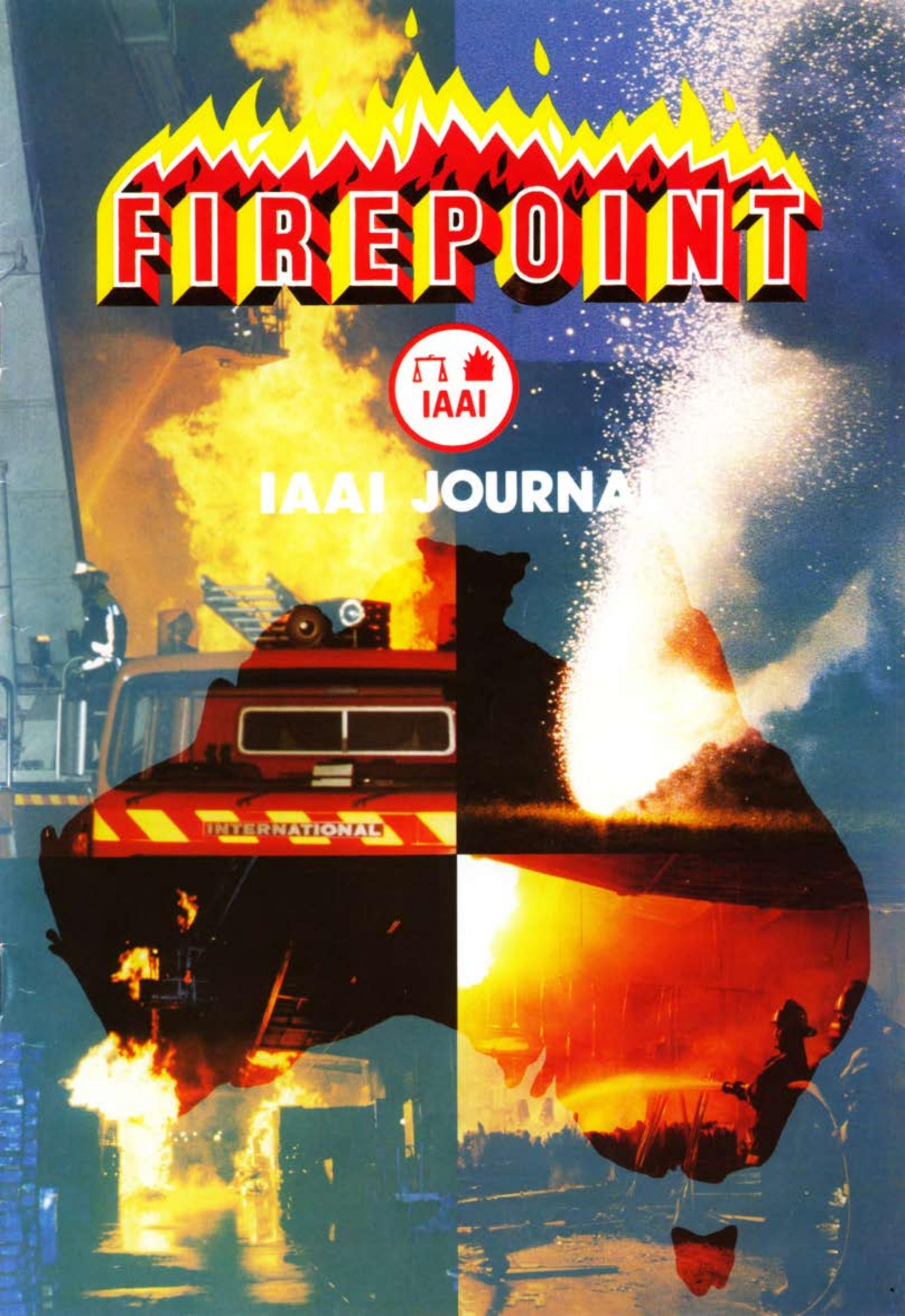


# FIREPOINT



IAAI JOURNAL



# Firepoint

## Victorian Association of Fire Investigators Chapter No. 58

President: Alex Conway

Phone: (03) 9420 3883  
Fax: (03) 9420 3886  
Mobile Phone: 0416 211 581

Vice President (Firepoint Representative)

Brian Neal

Phone: (03)9754 4569  
Fax: (03) 9762 2969  
Mobile: 0409 197 913 or then 018 836 869  
E-Mail: neal@hard.net.au

Secretary: Trevor Pillinger

Phone: (03) 9761 8333 or 0417 323 667  
Email: pillinger@investigatortraining.org

Treasurer: Bob Hetherington

Phone: (03) 9420 3876  
Email: bhetherigton@mffb.vic.gov.au

Postal Address: IAAI

Victorian Chapter No. 58  
c/- Alex Conway  
FIA-MFESB  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 619 Victoria Street  
Abbotsford  
Victoria 3067

## Queensland Association of Fire Investigators Inc. Chapter No. 59

President: Greg Reynolds

Phone: (07)3247 8160  
Fax: (07) 3297 5835  
E-Mail: greynold@emergency.qld.gov.au

Administration: Julianne Foley

Phone: (07) 3822 4700  
Fax: (07) 3822 3900  
E-Mail: admin\_officer@qafi.asn.au

Postal Address: Qld. Asscn. of Fire Investigators

P.O. Box 5173  
Alexandria Hills Qld 4161

## Association of Fire Investigators (N.S.W.) Chapter No. 47

President: Don Walshe

Phone: (02) 9742 7392  
Fax: (02) 9742 7385  
E-Mail: donald.walshe@nswfire.nsw.gov.au

Secretary: Norm Hewins

Phone: 9629 2872 (w)  
Mobile: 0418 654 584  
E-Mail: firefly\_511@bigpond.com

Postal Address: NSW Asscn. of Fire Investigators

P.O. Box 6129  
Baulkham Hills Business Centre NSW 2153

Editor: Wal Stern

Phone: (02) 9417 4921 Mobile: 0412 492 100  
Fax: (02) 9417 4921 E-Mail: Wal.Stern@uts.edu.au  
Postal Address: 93 Deepwater Road  
Castle Cove NSW 2069

## EDITORIAL

Ross Brogan is the Liaison Officer for the three Australian Chapters (New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria) with the international association, IAAI.

Earlier this year the three Australian Chapter Presidents met with him, and expressed concerns to him, to the effect that Australian members were not getting value for money, from IAAI membership.

To try and rectify this position, and to try and assist the IAAI recruit more members in Australia, it was agreed that the following proposition be put by Ross to the IAAI President at this year's IAAI AGM:

*"That every two years, for an Australian two-day conference, the Australian Chapters request that the IAAI arrange to send at least one specialist speaker (mutually agreed to by the IAAI and the organizing Chapter committee) to Australia to present at the conference. Whilst in Australia that speaker should be available to attend and make a presentation to meetings of all three Chapters, thus giving value to all members throughout Australia. Travel costs to be borne by the IAAI".*

In return, Australian Chapters would promote the advantages of IAAI membership, and offer a discount to IAAI members to the Australian two day conference.

We are waiting to hear how the IAAI reacts.

*Wal Stern*

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## QUEENSLAND CHAPTER REPORT

### Welcome

*By: Kate Ridgway*

Welcome to the second edition of the Firepoint for 2002.

The Major Project / Conference held on the 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> of March was a huge success. For those of you who were unable to attend, there is a short article on the Project further on in the newsletter. We will also be distributing to conference delegates and members the results from Nick Agnew's computer modeling together with Jim Munday's paper.

Our Annual General Meeting was held on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

The 2002 Committee members are listed further on in the newsletter together with their portfolio responsibilities. All members are welcome to contact committee members and participate in the various sub-committees.

We trust you will enjoy this edition of the newsletter.

### Conference Reports

#### Overview

*By: Michael Drummond*

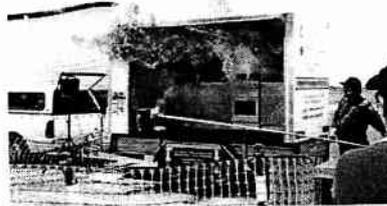
The QAFI's 2002 major project / conference "Prevention is Better Than Cure" was held on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> March 2002 at the Royal On The Park hotel, Brisbane and at the QFRA's training academy at Whyte Island.

The project was a roaring success with over 100 delegates from around Australia and overseas attending.

On the Friday, delegates listened to presentations from leading industry figures including Nick Agnew from Duncan Gilmore & Associates and Mike Woolmer, Senior Litigation Partner - Insurance, Gadens Lawyers.

Nick's presentation on computer modeling was followed up on Saturday by various live fire demonstrations including the testing of the computer modeling.

Delegates also had the opportunity of viewing two separate petro-chemical fires along with a kitchen cooking oil demonstration by Ted Beitz.



Topics on both days covered many issues facing not only emergency services but private industry and indeed the community generally.

The panel discussion highlighted the need for regular discussion and consultation between all stakeholders on the problems caused to our community by fire.

On the Friday night, Commissioner Phil Koperberg, Commissioner, NSW Rural Fire Service, delivered an informative and highly entertaining key-note speech on the recent NSW Bushfire Crisis to the delegates. Commissioner Koperberg's comments highlighted the fact that there is no easy fix to these issues, however, education and training are two areas of national if not international significance.

At the dinner, lifetime memberships were awarded to David Muir, National Insurance Business Leader, Deacons Lawyers, and Terry Casey of Forensic Services Australia for their tireless support and contribution to not only the QAFI but to the Queensland fire investigation scene in general.

By all accounts the conference has given many delegates plenty to think about and hopefully, a desire to debate and challenge the issues which face the industry.

We wish to sincerely thank all those that were involved in the organising of this conference including the guest speakers and delegates who attended along with our conference sponsors.

*Gold:*

**Pacific Adjusters**

*Bronze:*

**Kennedy's Forensic**

## QUEENSLAND CHAPTER REPORT

We would also like to thank **Delphine Rouessart**, Director – Professional Development Unit, QFRA Training Academy for kindly allowing us to utilise the facilities at Whyte Island. **Greg Reynolds, Nev Roberts, Adrian Barry** (QFRA-FIRU) and **Alan Faulks** (DIR-ESO) for the many hours contributed in planning and setting up the test burns.

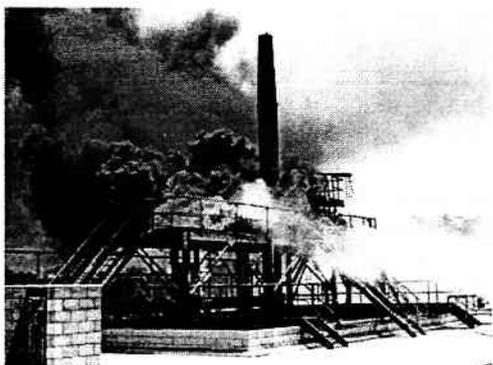
**Nev Paterson & Sons (Builders)** for kindly agreeing to remove the debris from the test burn house following the conference.

The support received from these individuals and organisations is greatly appreciated by the QAFI.

## Test Results

### Computer Modeling

The debriefing report on the computer modeling prepared by Dr. Nicholas Agnew has been distributed to conference delegates and members via email. Those not having supplied an email address have been forwarded a copy in the mail. If you do not receive your copy, please do not hesitate to contact Julianne Foley on (07) 3822 4700 or email



admin\_officer@qafi.asn.au

### VESDA – Fire detection

The Queensland Association of Fire Investigators, seminar held at the QFRS Training complex at Whyte Island, in March this year, provided an opportunity for Vision Systems Ltd. to provide a demonstration and conduct some in situ tests of its **VESDA** Early Warning Fire Detection System. A simulated

Warehouse application was constructed for which **VESDA** Aspirated detection is ideally suited.

A **VESDA** LaserPLUS detector was mounted external to the building with sampling pipes entering the rooms through a perimeter window. Despite the size and area in which the system was to detect, the pipe system was set out according to the relevant standards. Sampling pipe mounted on the ceiling covered both the upstairs and downstairs rooms. The system was also modeled using the **VESDA** "ASPIRE" computer software program and obligingly installed by Independent Fire Systems.

The demonstration began using pieces of electrical cable set on an electrical Hot Plate to simulate a slow developing incipient electrical fire. The hot plate was switched on at approximately 10:18:44 am.

Although detection was seen as early as 0.006%Obs/m at 10:20:06 am the "ALERT" threshold level did not alarm as the pre set default setting was 0.08 Obs/m. Once this threshold was reached an alarm was initiated at the detector. This would normally be linked to onsite Audio/Visual devices to alert the client of the potential problem.

Event Log figures and data obtained from the detector showed that the **VESDA** system reacted extremely well and as expected in this situation, providing enough time in a real situation to address any potential threat.

A FIRE 1 condition was reached after several minutes at a level of 0.2%Obs/m, a level still very early in terms of detection and well before any visible flames were present.

Warehouses these days, new and old, large and small present a high risk for fire. Open spaces, high racking and even higher ceilings make it difficult for the detection of smoke by conventional methods. Aspirating technology provides the best means in these applications for the detection of fire. Well-planned good quality detection of the right type is essential in these environments.

We would like to thank the organizers of the seminar for allowing us to participate.

## QUEENSLAND CHAPTER REPORT

### Visions Systems Fire & Security

If you would like any further information on VESDA systems please contact Paul Leslie on (07) 3246 5253.

## Annual General Meeting

The election of the 2002 QAFI Management Committee was conducted at the Annual General Meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> March at the Stamford Plaza, Brisbane.

The following association members were elected to their positions unopposed.

<b>President</b>	Greg Reynolds
<b>1<sup>st</sup> V.P.</b>	Kate Ridgway
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> V.P.</b>	Gary Nash
<b>Secretary</b>	Kate Hitchens
<b>Treasurer</b>	Mike Shield
<b>Committee</b>	Alan Faulks Michael Holohan Trevor Pohlmann Charles Foley

**Hon. Solicitor** Quentin Owen

We thank these members for agreeing to serve another term on the Executive Committee.

## Prosecution of Arson

*By: Kate Ridgway*

The Association was privileged to have Leanne Clare (Director, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions) speak at the AGM on 27 March 2002. Leanne's presentation included an analysis of the requirements and obligations of police officers, fire officers and private industry personnel such as the private fire scene examiner, insurance agents and private investigators in the preparation of an arson case.

Leanne acknowledged the work done by the fire investigation industry over the last few years.

She spoke of the importance of preserving the fire scene and the gathering of evidence. Leanne outlined the importance of photographing or filming the scene so as the scene may be brought to life particularly in jury cases. Preserving the scene enables

investigators/prosecution to go back at a later stage and respond to the issues raised by the defence.

Leanne gave examples of the cases she has been involved in where aspects of the investigation or particular factual matters may have not have seemed important but which become important or significant at a later stage.

Leanne remarked on the quality of the Childers Backpackers investigation. She regards it as a model investigation – achieved through the teamwork of the people involved from police, forensic experts, QFRS personnel and fire investigators. The way the investigation was conducted meant that experts were able to agree on some of the issues. Many of the issues in that case could be answered quickly and readily by the comprehensive investigation. It meant also that the defence accepted aspects of the evidence resulting in a shortening of the trial.

Leanne also touched upon the role of private investigators and in particular insurance investigators. She commented that a number of arsons would not have been uncovered had it not been for the work done by private investigators.

Leanne did however comment on the cases in which insurance investigators demonstrate a perceived bias. Leanne referred to the problems, which arise where there is undue interference with the police investigation by insurance/private investigators. She emphasised the need for a clear line to be drawn between the police, prosecutions and the insurance industry. The blurring of this line may result in evidence gathered by insurance investigators not being used in the prosecution of cases. Leanne noted the importance of being objective when looking at evidence.

Leanne's presentation served as a reminder to members on how to conduct investigations and some of the issues to bear in mind.

## Honorary Life Membership Awards

In May 1990, the Queensland Chapter of the International Association of Fire Investigators was founded and a small group of people keen on improving the quality of Fire Investigation in

## QUEENSLAND CHAPTER REPORT

Queensland and developing a greater community awareness of fires, met at the first committee meeting. Since then, the QAFI has grown substantially in both its membership and in the magnitude of the projects it undertakes.



The achievements of the QAFI are the result of the work of many people over the years; however there are always a small number who do more than most. It is obvious to anyone currently or formerly involved directly in the activities of the QAFI, that both Terry Casey (Forensic Services Australia Qld) and David Muir (Deacons Lawyers) have both been major contributors to the association, through the provision of their time, effort and expertise.

In recognition of their outstanding efforts in the QAFI, the association was proud to bestow upon them the inaugural Honorary Life Member Award.

The awards were presented to both Terry and David at the recent Conference dinner held on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

## IAAI Training & CFI Program

The IAAI offers extensive training courses to its U.S. members. Concerns have been raised regarding the lack of training initiatives to members outside the U.S. and in particular Australia.

This issue was discussed at the national meeting of Australian Chapter presidents held in Brisbane on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

As a result of that meeting it was decided that Ross Brogan, in his role as IAAI Australian Chapter Liaison would present a submission to the IAAI Board of Directors at the AGM/conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin later this month. Below is an extract from the proposal that Ross will present on our behalf (*if you would like to receive a copy of the full*

*proposal, please contact Julianne by email admin\_officer@qafi.asn.au)*

*The Presidents in Australia, on behalf of their members, are concerned that no value is being received from membership of the IAAI International by way of provision of training. In the USA there are at least ten courses available to members. This is definitely reflected in declining membership numbers.*

*To rectify that perception the following proposition is put to the President:*

*"That every two years, for the Australian two-day conference, the Australian Chapters request that the IAAI arrange to send at least one specialist speaker (mutually agreed to by the IAAI and organizing Chapter committee) to Australia to present at the conference. Whilst in Australia that speaker should be available to attend and make a presentation to meetings of the other two Chapters; giving value to all members throughout Australia by making the opportunity available. Travel costs to be borne by the IAAI.*

*\*(Value may be gained by stopping-over in NZ on the way in/out of Australia)\**

*To assist in regard to the problem of declining International membership the Australian Chapters will openly promote the advantages of International membership with recognition of provision of education assistance by the IAAI. At each two-day conference held within Australia, a discount equal to \$30 USD [currently \$60AUD] (or an amount agreed to as the difference between membership fees and service provision) will be offered to promote value of international membership.*

*The three Australian Chapter Presidents make this proposal in an effort to stimulate discussion on the matter and to assist both the members they represent in Australia and the International membership drive.*

We will update members on the outcome of this meeting when Ross returns from the U.S.

## C.F.I.

Consideration is also being given to introducing a CFI (Certified Fire Investigator) program in Australia. The program is well established in the U.S. Ross Brogan in his role as IAAI Australian Chapter Liaison is obligated to offer CFI certification to Australian members.

## QUEENSLAND CHAPTER REPORT

One of the problems with this is the setting up of a panel to scrutinise applications. The panel must consist of 3 CFI's. There are only a few in Australia with this qualification.

**The Committee would like to hear from anyone who is interested in applying for the CFI program. Depending on the level of interest, the Committee will look at this issue in more detail.**

### Train-the-Trainer Grant

As a commitment to provide training throughout the world, the IAAI Educational Foundation issued a \$800 (USD) grant to help offset the cost of attending the IAAI Annual General Meeting and Seminar to be held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin – May 2002.

Members were requested in the Feb/Mar newsletter to submit their application for this grant by the 29<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

Only one application was received from members of the QAFI and we are pleased to advise on behalf of the IAAI Education Foundation that Gary Nash, Forensic Services Australia (Qld) is the recipient of this Grant and will be attending the 2002 IAAI AGM & Convention.

Due to the enormous costs associated with attending the IAAI AGM this year, the QAFI received an application from Gary for funding assistance from the Chapter. The QAFI Executive committee subsequently approved a training grant of \$800.

On behalf of members, we wish Gary a safe trip and look forward to his return and subsequent presentation to members.

### Web Site

The QAFI web site is currently being updated and will include some of the Conference presentation papers including;

- "Working together to get the right answers" – Jim Munday
- "Benefits of Computer Modeling" by Dr. Nicholas Agnew

- "What was Lawful Yesterday – Is it Lawful today?" by Mike Woolmer, Partner in Charge – Gadens.

- with some photo's. This task should be accomplished by the end of May and we hope you will find time to have a look.

### QAFI Polo Shirts

The QAFI recently purchased a number of quality white polo shirts with the association's logo and name embroidered in red on the left-hand side.

These are now available for members to purchase at a cost of \$25 each (sizes S, M, L & XL). If you would like to order a shirt, please contact Julianne on 3822 4700 or email [admin\\_officer@qafi.asn.au](mailto:admin_officer@qafi.asn.au)

--- They look great! – Order yours now !!

### Membership

#### New Members

The Chapter Executive Committee extends a warm welcome to the following new members.

- Alan Titman, Queensland Fire & Rescue Service
- Stephen Tam (Building Surveyor)
- Bradley Jeffs, Queensland Fire & Rescue Service

### Upcoming Event

**Date** Wed 21 August 2002  
**Time** 12.00pm to 2.30pm **Where**  
Stamford Plaza, Bris

#### *Investigation - The Childers Backpacker's Tragedy*

The QAFI have tentatively set aside this date for our next members meeting. Further information will be forwarded to members following confirmation of speakers. For more information call 3822 4700.

## **Application for Membership**

### **Association of Fire Investigators**

**(A Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators)**

---

I hereby apply for membership of the Association of Fire Investigators in the State of ..... in accordance with its constitution and by-laws, and agree to be bound thereby.

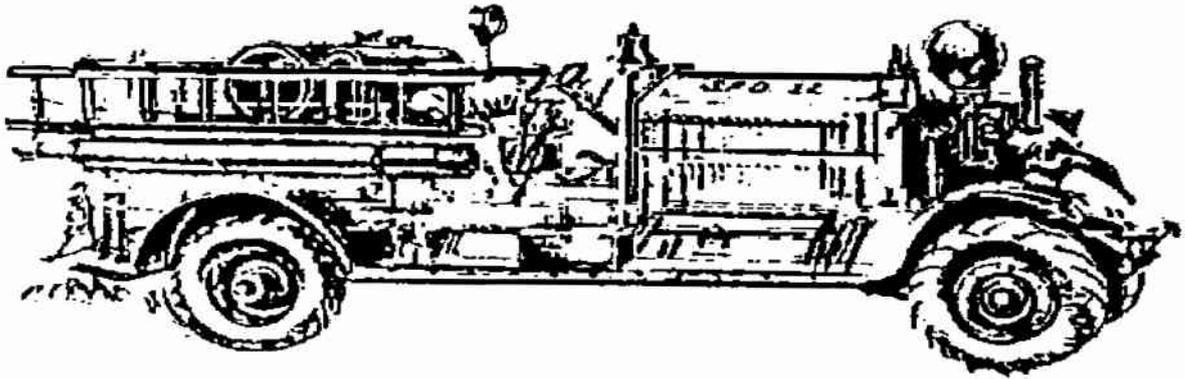
I attach the amount of \$..... in payment of annual dues.

---

1. Name in Full
2. Address for Mail
3. Position Held (e.g. police or fire brigade officer, lawyer, investigator, assessor)
4. Company/Agency
5. Telephone
6. Mobile
7. Fax No.
8. E-mail Address
9. Signature
10. Name of Member Recommending you
11. Telephone No. of Member
12. Address or E-mail No. of Member
13. Signature of Recommending Member

Give your completed form with your payment to any committee member of the Association, or mail it to the appropriate postal address, as shown on page 3. This page also lists contact names and numbers if you have any inquiries.

## Letters to the Editor



I thought I would respond to your request re the possibility of bottles and cans being the source of ignition in the bush, as mentioned in your last editorial.

My experience is that bottles and cans are NOT an ignition source for wildfires in the NSW Blue Mountains unless they have been used to carry something like petrol or kerosene. I believe my experience would be reflected in other parts of NSW.

I lead a three man origin and cause wildfire investigation team for the Rural Fire Service in the Blue Mountains. We have been operating since October 1994 and have completed over 450 wildfire investigations, some small and some very big.

Whilst we see bottles and cans at lots of

wildfires we have not yet been able to put them down as a cause. If my memory serves me right some years ago John Boath and a friend did some research into bottles in the bush; their findings reflect our experience. John's work was written up in "Firepoint". If bottles and cans were a source, we in the Blue Mountains would be in big trouble. As a firefighter some years ago I did go to one fire that had an origin around an open beer bottle that had kerosene in it.

My understanding is that with a bottle or can as it lays in the surface litter it is stationary. However the sun is not, therefore it is unlikely that you would get a point source for heat generation.

In addition, we find bottles and cans

generally have a coating of dust or have been effected by the bush environment, which dulls their surface, further reducing the heat generation effect. If there were any shade around this would further reduce the sun's influence on the object.

It would be interesting to view the fire mentioned in the article; by doing so we might be able to determine any fire run to see where the origin actually was, provided the scene has not been disturbed. Unfortunately since December we have had a lot of rain.  
Regards

Warren Day

P.S. Is there anybody in the Botany area of Sydney who would be prepared to guide me in a small research project?

# PYROMANIA – FACT OR FICTION?

Rebekah Doley BA(Hons)  
Grad Dip App Psych  
MSc(Inv Psy)<sup>1</sup>

Criminal Behaviour Analyst  
and Consulting Psychologist

*Abstract: The issue of deliberate firesetting is a growing concern in Australia. Every hour of every day in Australia at least one arson fire is lit, and this type of criminal behaviour is costing the country over \$157 million annually in property losses alone. Although much has been written on the subject of arson there remains substantial confusion about the nature and extent of pyromania within the arsonist population. This paper explores some of the common misperceptions that exist in the literature and attempts to clarify the true magnitude of pyromania in Australia's arsonist population.*

Every hour of every day in Australia at least one arson fire is lit. Arson costs this country in the region of \$157 million every year in direct

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence may be addressed to the author at PO Box 103, Puckapunyal MILPO 3662 Australia, or email: rebekahdoley@bigpond.com.

property losses alone. This figure does not include the loss of life and personal injury suffered by those involved in escaping the flames or fighting the fire (Insurance Council of Australia, 1998). Deliberate firesetting, or "arson" as it is generally legally defined<sup>2</sup>, is on the increase in Australia. The question is – how culpable are the people responsible?

A popular view is that many arsonists are in fact pyromaniacs, responding to an irrepressible urge to light fires. Pyromaniacs are variously thought to be irresistibly attracted to flames, to receive sexual gratification from seeing fire, and to perform repeated acts of more and more serious firesetting for the sole purpose of self-gratification. While this may offer some offenders a convenient defence, the question of whether pyromania really exists was raised as early as the 1800's when Charles Pilgrim is quoted as saying:

<sup>2</sup> The terms "arson" and "firesetting" will be used interchangeably throughout this paper. The legal definition for deliberate firesetting leading to the destruction of property varies between policing jurisdictions in Australia. However the term "arson" is commonly acknowledged as a legal definition while firesetting describes the behaviour itself.

"We must therefore conclude that there is no such psychological entity as pyromania and that an incendiary act is either the crime of arson or the symptom of a diseased or ill-developed brain" (cited in Geller, 1987, p. 501).

Relatively recent research has suggested that fire investigators and some mental health professionals may be misinformed about the true nature of pyromania (Huff, Gary, & Icove, 1997). This is significant because a comprehensive understanding of deliberate firefighting behaviour is integral to an effective strategy to manage and control this type of criminal act.

The aim of this paper is to debunk some of the myths surrounding pyromania and to provide fire investigators and related professionals with more accurate and up-to-date information concerning the current state of play in this area.

## THE \$157 MILLION QUESTION

The notion that something beyond our control is responsible for our actions is a seductive one for some. It alleviates the need to accept responsibility for our behaviour and provides a ready-made excuse for any damage we may

cause. But when this is applied to firesetting the whole concept becomes much more significant.

Some authors have queried the utility of applying such clinical terms in a legal context (Foust, 1979). Others have claimed that the term "pyromania" is really a catch-all phrase for a range of psychiatric disorders and has no real psychiatric significance (Huff et al., 1997; Robbins & Robbins, 1967). Nevertheless, despite the confusion surrounding the term a large and diverse body of literature exists on the topic, which is mostly psychoanalytic in nature, highly theoretical and based predominantly on single case studies (Geller, Erlen, & Pinkus, 1986; Monopolis & Lion, 1986; Warner, 1932).

### **Origins Of The Term**

Conflicting versions of the origins of the word "pyromania" have been given. One account maintains that it is derived from the Greek "fire" and "madness" and denotes an overpowering desire to light fires (Lewis, 1966). Another suggests that it is derived from the 19<sup>th</sup> century term "monomania" and refers to a particular type of insanity characterised by seemingly motiveless impulsive behaviour

(Mavromatis & Lion, 1977). The term itself was used interchangeably with "firesetting" in early literature on arson somewhat confusing the origins of the disorder and making it difficult to determine accurately the likely prevalence of pyromania at that time. The essential feature of pyromania is the tension or arousal experienced by the individual prior to the deliberate firesetting act combined with a general fascination with fire and its trappings as well as a feeling of relief or pleasure when setting the fire or afterwards. The reason why fire itself should afford relief, however, remains unknown (Barker, 1994).

### **Clinical Description**

Over time mental health professionals have made some headway into providing a clearer and more categorical description of the illness, particularly in terms of describing the condition. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is a classification system developed and published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) for clinicians and researchers in the field of mental health. It provides specific diagnostic criteria for a range of mental disorders to be used by clinicians internationally

to guide in the diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric disturbances.

Pyromania appeared in the first edition of DSM (DSM-I, APA, 1952) only as a supplementary term. It disappeared completely in DSM-II (APA, 1968), later reappearing under the category of "Impulse Control Disorders Not Elsewhere Classified" in DSM-III (APA, 1980) and in the revised version DSM-III-R (APA, 1987), as well as in the most current edition, DSM-IV (APA, 1994).

Under this definition, for a diagnosis of pyromania to be made there has to be a clear pattern of impulsive firesetting behaviour that is preceded by a feeling of tension and followed by a sense of relief or pleasure once the act has been completed. The specific criteria that need to be met for an accurate clinical diagnosis of pyromania are clearly articulated in DSM-IV (APA, 1994; refer box).

Criterion A emphasises the presence of recurrent firesetting to help to distinguish this form of arson from other motivations for firesetting (Frances, First, & Pincus, 1995). The features that distinguish the specific motivation for firesetting in pyromania and account

for its being included in the "Impulse-Control Disorders" category are described in Criterion B, C, and D. Finally, because historically impulsive firesetting has been associated with various mood disorders, alcohol or substance

abuse problems, and certain personality disorders (McElroy, Hudson, Pope, Keck Jr, & Aizley, 1992) the context in which the firesetting may occur needs to be clarified in the diagnostic criteria for pyromania. Criterion E and F

therefore are designed to ensure that firesetting behaviour that occurs in association with other mental disturbances, such as conduct disorder, is excluded from the clinical definition of pyromania.

- **Diagnostic criteria for 312.33 Pyromania**
- A. Deliberate and purposeful fire setting on more than one occasion.
- B. Tension or affective arousal before the act.
- C. Fascination with, interest in, curiosity about, or attraction to fire and its situational contexts (e.g., paraphernalia, uses, consequences).
- D. Pleasure, gratification, or relief when setting fires, or when witnessing or participating in their aftermath.
- E. The fire setting is not done for monetary gain, as an expression of sociopolitical ideology, to conceal criminal activity, to express anger or vengeance, to improve one's living circumstances, in response to a delusion or hallucination, or as a result of impaired judgement (e.g., in dementia, Mental retardation, Substance Intoxication).

**COMMON (MIS)PERCEPTIONS**

One of the main concerns in this field is the propensity for inaccurate ideas about pyromania to misdirect an investigator. In the following discussion a few of the most glaring misperceptions frequently expressed about pyromania will be considered and hopefully a more accurate picture of this disorder will result.

**Description**

The meaning of the term "pyromania" as it is used in a clinical context differs substantially from the perception of the disorder that is commonly held by many non-clinicians. For example, Scott (1977) offers a rather colourful description of the pyromaniac when he notes that among other characteristics the "firebug" is likely to display facial disfigurement, low intelligence, sexual

dysfunction, poor adjustment to life including frequent job changes, a lack of stable relationships, as well as alcohol abuse (p. 815). He describes the firesetting behaviour of a "firebug" as being unplanned and set in places likely to be easily detected. MacDonald (1977) describes the "compulsive firesetter". He uses the term interchangeably with "pyromania" and claims these individuals obtain excitement and / or sexual

gratification from their fires. MacDonald continues by noting that their motives also included anger, revenge, hatred, and jealousy, clearly blurring the boundary between the "true" definition of pyromania and other types of arsonist. More accurately, Rider (1980) emphasised that the main reason the pyromaniac differs from other arsonists is because they do not have a conscious motivation for their firesetting, but are responding instead to what is described as an "irresistible impulse" to light fires. However, the gap between what is *believed* about pyromania and what is *known* is probably best illustrated in a recent study by Geller et al. (1997).

Participants involved in training sessions in advanced fire investigation conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) were recruited to provide a definition of pyromania in their own words (Geller et al., 1997). Fire agency personnel, insurance investigators, law enforcement and mental health professionals were included in the sample. The 603 definitions collected were then compared to the criteria listed in DSM-III-R for pyromania, examining for

both the behavioural aspects (e.g., deliberate and purposeful; tension build up before the fire) as well as the more clinical features of the disorder. The results were telling. No definition fully encapsulated the five diagnostic criteria for pyromania. In fact, when the accuracy of the definitions was considered no participant scored higher than 55%.

The reason for this generally poor understanding of the condition became clear when Geller et al. (1997) reviewed the information available to fire personnel and law enforcement officers and found several published works that clearly provided readers with misleading and / or wrong information about pyromania. The source of this type of confusing misinformation is not only limited to non-clinical writers on the topic (e.g., Koch, 1993; Waller, 1994), but includes some published accounts by mental health professionals as well (e.g., Gold, 1962; Lewis, 1966). Ultimately, in their study Geller et al. concluded that much of the literature available to investigators and law enforcement officers provides misleading and even inaccurate information about pyromania, and

sources of more reliable information, such as the psychiatric literature, are unlikely to be easily accessible, let alone accessed, by this readership.

### **Prevalence**

Another popular belief, promulgated in no small part by the mass media, is the notion that most serial arsonists are pyromaniacs. In fact this could not be further from the truth. Although often included in classification systems of arson, reports of cases of pyromania are becoming less frequent (refer Table 1). Estimates vary but have been reported as high as 40% (Blumberg, 1981; Lewis & Yarnell, 1951). Other authors have documented relatively large numbers of cases of apparently motiveless arson that may be suggestive of a pattern of impulsive firesetting (Bourget & Bradford, 1989; Hurley & Monahan, 1969; O'Sullivan & Kelleher, 1987).

Although there appears to be quite an extensive range in the literature, on balance the reported instance of true pyromania is becoming increasingly infrequent. For example, MacDonald (1977) notes that fire investigators he interviewed with between 10 and 20 years experience each, were

able to identify only about 5 to 10 male and 2 to 3 female pyromaniacs (as defined by the investigator) from the entire course of their career. These figures are much more consistent with the bulk of evidence that supports the relatively rare incidence of the disorder (Geller, 1987; McElroy et al., 1992; Perr, 1979; Rice & Harris, 1991; Soltys, 1992).

#### The sex-fire link

One of the more frequent misconceptions that

abound is the link between pyromania and a sexual motive for firesetting, which originated in psychodynamic explanations of arson. Stekel (1924) was one of the first theorists to associate a sexual motive with firesetting, however probably the most well known author who wrote of this connection was Freud (1932). Freud first connected firesetting behaviour to enuresis (bedwetting) and later suggested that firesetting

was a sort of symbolic masturbation for the individual, writing "the warmth radiated by fire evokes the same kind of glow as accompanies the state of sexual excitation, and the form and motion of the flame suggest the phallus in action" (1932, p. 407).

There has been some support for the psychodynamic explanation of arson, particularly in studies of juvenile firesetters

Table 1. Reported prevalence of pyromania in the psychiatric and arson literature.

Study	Sample	Operational definition	No. pyromania (%)
Coid et al. (1999)	25 female arsonist psychiatric patients	DSM-IV	14 (56)
(Harmon, Rosner, & Wiederlight, 1985)	27 female arsonist psychiatric patients	DSM-III	0
Koson & Dvoskin (1982)	26 male arsonists referred for pretrial psychiatric assessment	DSM-III	0
(Leong, 1992)	29 male & female arsonists referred for pretrial psychiatric assessment	DSM-III-R	0
Lewis & Yarnell (1951)	Case reports of 1145 male arsonists	Self-report	688 (60)
O'Sullivan & Kelleher (1987)	17 male incarcerated arsonists, 37 male & female arsonist psychiatric patients	ICD-9	0
(Prins, Tennent, & Trick, 1985)	Parole files of 113 male arsonists	Researcher interpretation	0
Rice & Harris (1991)	243 male incarcerated psychiatric patients	DSM-III-R	1 (0.41)
Ritchie & Huff (1999)	Case files of 234 convicted male and 49 female arsonists	Not specified	3 (0.01)
Robbins & Robbins (1967)	Fire Authority statistics concerning 136 adult & 103 juvenile convicted arsonists	Not specified	Adult 41 (30) Juvenile 14 (14)

Kaufman, Heims and Reiser (1961), for example, interviewed 30 firesetting boys under the age of 17 years all of whom had significant histories of emotional disturbance. They found support for a psychodynamic explanation of firesetting for this sample.

Kaufman et al. reported that over half the sample was enuretic and three quarters of the boys exhibited behaviours that the authors interpreted as evidence of uncontrolled instinctual drives, such as rage, hyperactivity, mutual masturbation and fellatio, exhibiting their genitals, and looking under women's skirts.

They concluded that these children exhibited oral fixations associated with disturbances of their libidinal and aggressive drives. Subsequent researchers have reported evidence of sexual dysfunction in further studies of arsonists (e.g., Hurley & Monahan, 1969; Lange & Kirsch, 1989; MacDonald, 1977). However, a preponderance of research has failed to support the psychodynamic formulation.

In the most comprehensive study of arson to date, Lewis and

Yarnell (1951) examined the psychosocial histories of 1145 adult male firesetters and found only 40 individuals reported sexual arousal associated with firesetting. More recently, a study of 243 male firesetters revealed only six people who derived sexual pleasure from setting or watching fire (Rice & Harris, 1991). Other researchers report no difference in sexual arousal patterns, as measured by phallometrics or reported sexual maladjustment, to fire related stimuli between non-firesetter subjects compared with arsonists (Koson & Dvoskin, 1982; Quinsey, Chaplin, & Upfold, 1989).

Similarly, while some researchers have reported a link between enuresis and repeated firesetting (see Barnett & Spitzer, 1994), others have failed to find a significant difference between arsonists and non-arsonists in incidence of enuresis (Bradford, 1982; Hill et al., 1982). The conclusion of a comprehensive and recent review of the subject was that "all recent papers on overt sexually motivated acts of firesetting emphasize its rare occurrence" (Barnett & Spitzer, 1994, p. 8).

## **WHY INCONSISTENT INFORMATION?**

The question of why inaccurate and misleading information about the disorder is still being published quite recently (e.g., White, 1996) is an interesting one. It would be easy to speculate that it is the fault of the writer in not checking their facts prior to setting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard as the case may be).

However, there are consistent difficulties associated with undertaking research in criminal behaviour that may also account for some of the apparently contradictory information available. These issues centre around the definition of pyromania used, the type of data collected, the way in which that information is then interpreted and, most importantly, how representative of the total population of arson offenders is the study sample used.

### **Operational definition**

One explanation for the inconsistency in reported prevalence of pyromania has been addressed earlier. Clearly the popular definition of pyromania differs substantially from the clinical definition.

Studies that rely on a non-clinical operational definition may overestimate the occurrence of the disorder. Also, current clinical diagnostic criteria are significantly more exacting than has been used previously (Stewart, 1993).

Pyromaniacs are now clearly distinguished in a clinical context from arsonists for whom the act of deliberate fire lighting forms part of other mental disorders such as conduct disorder, mania, or antisocial personality disorder or is committed in response to hallucinations or delusions (APA, 1994). Consequently, the term pyromania may have been misapplied historically, accounting for the infrequency of its appearance in more current literature.

### **Interpretation of self-reported information**

Problems with the way in which data about deliberate firesetting behaviour is obtained and interpreted may also have an impact on how we understand the issue of pyromania. Much of the research on arson utilises official records and self-reports. The problems associated with these sources have been well documented (Blackburn, 1993; Hollin, 1989).

Records may vary in completeness and contain different information across forces and official recording bodies. The information provided by these records is subject to biases through variations in detection rates for different crimes, and different law enforcement policies and practices.

Self-report instruments overcome some of these concerns, and can provide a much richer and more detailed account of criminal behaviour. However, the data is limited by the questions asked of the subject and by his or her willingness to provide complete and accurate information (Petersilia, 1980).

Furthermore, self-reported descriptions of the incident and motives are open to misinterpretation by researchers. Kaufman et al.'s (1961) study, for example, involved clinical interviews of their subjects but their conclusions concerning the firesetting behaviour were based largely on the clinician's subjective interpretation of the interview material. Rice and Harris (1991) note the difficulties in determining the "true" motive of firesetting highlighting the fact that any diagnosis of pyromania relies on the offender having the insight and ability to

articulate why they set the fire. Further, they draw attention to the preponderance of mixed motives in cases of deliberate firesetting that may mask the impulsivity that is so essential a part of the clinical criteria for pyromania.

Certainly, the difficulties in identifying a true reason for firesetting and the fact that frequently firesetting is undertaken with more than one motive in mind has been extensively noted (Fineman, 1995; Prins, Tennent, & Trick, 1985; Rider, 1980; Wood, 2000). Moreover, self-reported information is already compromised by sample bias, in that self-report samples have volunteered to participate in the research.

There may also be problems relating to memory and deliberate distortions that affect the validity of the information obtained. Thus, official records can limit what may be studied by virtue of the information that is available; and, self-report data, while potentially a source of detailed information, has concerns relating to the reliability of the information obtained.

## Study population

Two types of study populations are most often utilised in arson research: cohorts and known offenders. The most common population used are known offenders, either incarcerated or in forensic (i.e., psychiatric) settings. This is the easiest population to identify and locate and has the additional advantage of having much of their background information available on official records. However, the extent to which these samples are truly representative of the general population of arsonists is questionable.

The official clear-up rates for arson continue to show a significant number of these crimes remain unsolved (refer Figure 1). It has been suggested that much of what is known about arsonists is in fact more pertinent to describing the incompetent firesetter, as those who are more criminally-skilled are presumably more successful in covering their tracks and avoiding detection (Levin, 1976; Woodward, 1992). As an example, Koson and

Dvoskin (1982) found that out of their sample of 26 arsonists referred for pre-trial psychiatric assessment, 38 percent (10) had a prior history of one or more acts of firesetting. The total number of previous fires set by this sub-group amounted to 46 and yet they had a history of only eight prior arrests and convictions between them.

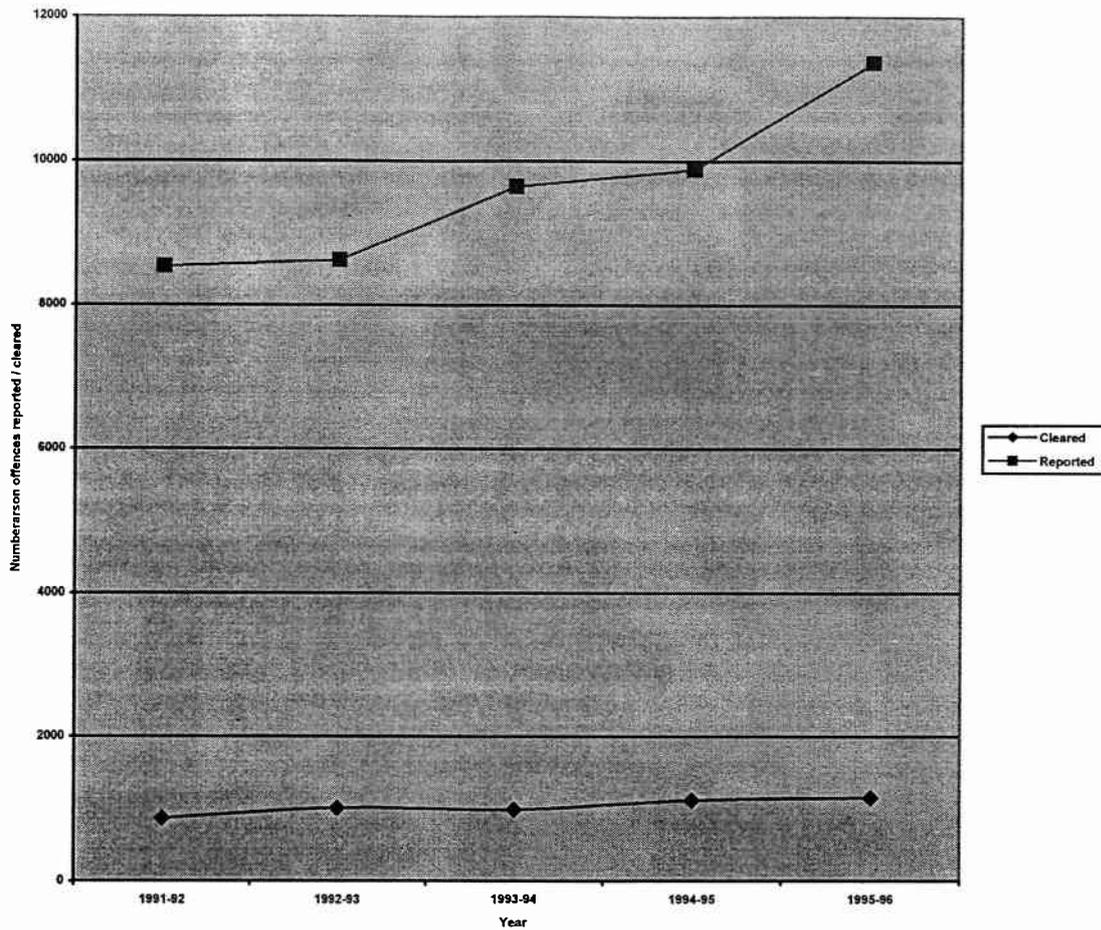
Furthermore, once apprehended, many arsonists may not actually have a conviction of arson recorded against them due to the legal disposition of these cases. Many arson cases may not be processed due to, for example, lack of evidence, mental health concerns for the defendant, or acquittal of the individual. Plea-bargaining to lesser offences unrelated to arson also occurs, which "statistically distorts the actual number of arsonists prosecuted and conceals their identities under other dispositions" (Rider, 1980, p. 9).

Cohort studies, on the other hand, select a sample at a specific point in life and follow these

individuals for a defined period of time. Soothill and Pope (1973), for example, employed this method to study 82 individuals who had been charged with arson in 1951, selected on the basis of court records. They followed the cohort over a 20-year period, focusing on prior criminal record and subsequent convictions.

These researchers commented on several difficulties with this procedure, including the fact that the definition of arson has altered over the years, potentially distorting the statistics for repeat offending.

Moreover, the length of incarceration for some individuals had implications for the study (i.e., 17 people had a sentence of less than 2 years, 16 people had a sentence of more than 2 years, and 2 people had a sentence greater than 10 years). Finally, the difficulties of detecting arson were acknowledged so that lack of reconviction should not be taken as absence of the behaviour.



**Figure 1.** Number of arson offences reported to police compared to number of arson offences cleared, Australia 1991 – 1996. Adapted from Police Annual Reports and "A statistical profile of crime in Australia" by S. Mukherjee, C. Carcach, & K. Higgins, 1997, Australian Institute of Criminology: Canberra. Adapted with permission.

**THE ANSWER**

The answer to the original \$157 million question is not clear-cut. The nature of arson research means that we know most about the least successful arsonist and what we do know may not be conclusive. In terms specifically of pyromania it is clear that much of the published literature available provides at best misleading, at worse inaccurate, information

about the nature of impulsive firesetting. Many investigators are labouring under misconceptions that may prove distracting. The question of whether pyromaniacs even exist, let alone are culpable, remains unanswered. It is hoped, however, that this paper has at least gone part of the way towards bridging the gap between what is believed and what is known about pyromania.

**Editor's Note:**

*If you would like to receive a copy of the references used in this article, please contact the editor of "Firepoint", [Wal.Stern@uts.edu.au](mailto:Wal.Stern@uts.edu.au) or the author of this paper [rebekahdoley@bigpond.com](mailto:rebekahdoley@bigpond.com) and a copy will be forwarded to you.*

# VICTORIAN NEWS

## TRAINING SESSIONS

The topic of Crime Scene Investigation provided us with a successful night. On the 10<sup>th</sup> April, the Chapter presented this session at the MFESB Training College in Abbotsford with Brad Mason from the Victorian State Forensic Centre as the presenter. The meeting was attended by 18 members and 22 guests.

The importance of evidence protection and preservation was stressed and there was a discussion of paper bags v plastic bags, the recognition and reporting correctly. Camera techniques and the types of photos that should be taken and how were also discussed. The legalities of digital pictures and the use of electronic medium provided an interesting insight into recording and photos in the future.

Thanks to the MFESB for the use of their facilities and to Brad for his presentation.

The Chapter had a visit to CFA Training College, Fiskville on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2002. The occasion was a presentation on Explosives and Explosions, a practical demonstration

by our in house Forensic Specialist John Kelleher. After a brief introduction to explosives, we moved from the Auditorium to the Training Block.

After a few introductory bangs and burns, the concentration was on the destruction of the cars. Members were placed in a safe area for viewing for the explosions and moved forward to view the damage. This worked well. This training attracted 65 persons and 16 new memberships.

The Chapter's thanks to John, Mike and George for their expertise, MFB FireVision for their videoing and to the CFA Training College, especially Chris, for their hospitality.

## MEMBERSHIP

Membership is currently at 187 members. The committee has approved a further new members to the Chapter being Sharon Merritt, David Gerrad, Ian Nash, Ray Mason, Robert Baker, Graham

Robinson, Graeme Birkett, Andrew Thomson, Simone McInerney and Paul Villani. Welcome to all our new members. It is important that all members ensure that they have paid the 2001/2002 fees as membership fees are due as of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2002 for 2002/2003. If you're not sure contact Bob Hetherington, our Chapter Registrar.

## TRAINING SESSIONS 2002

The Chapter Committee is still working towards several different sessions during the year. There has been set a seminar on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> & Friday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2002. Mark these dates in your calendar. **See the Flyer in this issue of Firepoint for details.** All members will be notified as sessions are organized.

If any member has an interest or any requests and /or assisting in running a session please contact one of the committee.

It is important to register prior to your attendance at sessions with the committee members so that catering and sufficient space is available.

**N.S.W. Association of Fire Investigators Inc.**  
(International Association of Arson Investigators (Chapter 47))



### **Membership**

There are still a number of members who have not yet paid their 2002 fees. They are now well overdue. If you are not in this category, please ignore this message. If you have not yet made your payment, please forward your remittance of \$40, as soon as possible, to the Treasurer (the address is given on page 3).

We want you as a member. We need your fees to pay our expenses.

### **President's Message**

As they say, time flies and it is almost time for me to say "adios" as President. Two years is the maximum a person can serve as President and on Friday July 5<sup>th</sup>, following our House Burn Workshop, the AGM will take place and a new committee and President will be voted in. The last two years has gone quickly and it was a steep-learning curve for me.

As a team, I think your committee has done well. The 2001 conference was a great success due to their hard work.

This year the house burn on July 5<sup>th</sup> looks like being a very interesting day. We plan to have a hands-on investigation workshop, similar to our car burn day at Penrith Museum of Fire. Our two-day conference in 2003 is already being organised with the prospect of having John DeHaan as guest speaker looking to be a real possibility.

Information evenings will continue to be a feature of our training and education program. The NSW Chapter is in a strong position with membership growing.

I would like to thank the committee for its hard work and support. The NSW Chapter is very fortunate to have such dedicated people and I would encourage anyone interested in

becoming part of the committee to attend the AGM, new blood would be welcome. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as President and I wish the next President all the best. Stay safe.

*Don Walshe*

### **Dates for the Diary**

*July 5, 2002*

Conference, House Burn and AGM (Sydney)

*October 18, 2002*

1 Day Conference (Canberra)

*August 7 and 8, 2003*

2 day Conference with John DeHaan