



## Firefighter arson: part 2 – profile

A reliable profile of a 'typical' firefighter arsonist could be a useful tool for investigators or senior brigade personnel. It would assist in narrowing the scope of an investigation or providing a basis for further examination during the recruitment process. Two attempts have been made to establish profiles of firefighters who commit arson: by the South Carolina Forestry Commission and the FBI's Behavior Analysis Unit. No formal evaluations of the efficacy of the two profiles are known to exist, but they are reportedly considered by law enforcement officers to present a 'remarkably accurate' profile of most known cases. While these must be applied with some caution to the Australian setting, the fact that one of the profiles was developed by a forestry fire service increases the applicability of the profiles to the bushfire context.

South Carolina Forestry Commission	FBI's Behavior Analysis Unit
White male, age 17–26	White male, age 17–25
Product of disruptive, harsh or unstable rearing environment	One or both parents missing from home during childhood. If from intact home, the home atmosphere was mixed and unstable
Poor relationship with father, over-protective mother	Dysfunctional. One of the parents left the home before the child reached age 17. Cold, distant, hostile or aggressive relationship with natural father
If married, poor marital adjustment.	Poor marital adjustment. If not married, still living at home with parents
Lacking in social and interpersonal skills	Lack of stable interpersonal relationships
Poor occupational adjustment, employed in low-paying jobs	Poor occupational adjustment. Menial labourer, skilled labourer, clerical jobs
Fascinated with the fire service and its trappings	Interested in fire service in the context that it provides an arena for excitement, not for the sake of public service
May be facing unusual stress (family, financial or legal problems)	Alcoholism, childhood, hyperactivity, homosexuality, depression, borderline personality disorder, suicidal tendencies
Average to above-average intelligence but poor to fair academic performance in school	Mixed findings on intelligence, but most found to have average to higher intelligence. Poor academic performance

Source: United States Fire Administration (USFA) 2003, Table 1

Researchers have found that firefighter arsonists are usually relatively junior, in their first three years of service. They tend to use available materials, such as paper or clothes, together with petrol and matches or cigarette lighters. Generally firefighter arsonists work alone, but instances of them working together as a group have been found. In a team setting, they may seem arrogant, cocky or overbearing. Younger individuals may be overly eager to please or attention-seeking.

### For more information:

Huff TG 1994. Fire-setting fire fighters: identifying and preventing arsonists in fire departments. Focus on: arson. *IAFC on scene* 8(15): 6–7

United States Fire Administration (USFA) 2003. *Firefighter arson: special report*. Maryland: USFA. <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/tr-141.pdf>

