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Arson suspects sought in metro Detroit

BY GINA DAMRON
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The Pontiac Fire Department and the Oakland County Sheriff's Office are jointly investigating arson in the city, particularly blazes set in unoccupied homes.

Oakland County Undersheriff Michael McCabe said there have been arsons set at 16 unoccupied dwellings since March, set between the hours of about 12:30-7:30 a.m.

"There's a pattern here," he said. "That's our firm belief."

There have been more than 20 fires set in Pontiac dwellings since February, including two occupied homes during the Fourth of July weekend, said Darryl Fowlkes, Pontiac's fire marshal. The residents weren't home, he said.

Since February, there also have been more than a dozen fires with causes that are undetermined, meaning the blazes could have been sparked by anything from electrical problems to arson. Six of those were vehicle fires; the rest were homes and garages.

"They could be anybody," he said of whoever is starting the blazes. "Could be somebody just walking down the street bored and decided he's going to set something on fire."

One man has been charged in one case. George L. Musall, 42, was arraigned Monday on a charge of arson in connection with a fire set at a two-story home Sunday, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Like Pontiac, Highland Park has seen a rash of arsons. An employee in the city's fire department confirmed Wednesday that there were four fires in the city Tuesday believed to be arson.

The Free Press reported June 4 that Highland Park Mayor Hubert Yopp said that there had been 12 to 13 suspicious fires in the city up to that point. Yopp could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Fowlkes and McCabe said there's always a danger that a fire at an unoccupied home can spread to a nearby occupied home.

"We're lucky that nobody's died," McCabe said.

Through its reward program, the Michigan Arson Prevention Committee provides up to \$5,000 for information that leads to the arrest and/or conviction of an arsonist, the committee's Web site says. For information, call 800-442-7766 (800-44-ARSON).

Contact GINA DAMRON: 586-826-7269 or gdamron

@freepress.com

