

# COGGLEVATION

AUGUST 2017 | THE LIFE AND TIMES OF PF&R'S STRATEGIC PLAN | WWW.PORTLANDOREGON.GOV/FIRE/COGGLE

## ARSON

### WHO YOU GONNA CALL? ARSON BUSTERS!

In just two days, PF&R's Arson Investigators handled back-to-back deadly arsons



Some of the arson squad: (from left) Jason Andersen, Joe Luiz, and Rick McGraw

In the early morning hours of July 23, a second-alarm fire broke out at an apartment building on Northeast Glisan Street. By the time its embers were extinguished, two people tragically lost their lives, along with pet snakes and a dog. Ten adults and 15 children were displaced by the fire, losing their homes and their belongings. By July 27, a man was arrested on charges of aggravated murder and arson and booked into Multnomah County Jail.

The day after the Glisan Street fire, calls came into 9-1-1 at about 2:30 pm reporting an explosion on North Kerby Street. Firefighters arrived to find a residence destroyed by the explosion and neighborhood homes damaged and on fire. It was determined that the illegal production of butane hash oil caused the explosion and ensuing fires, which also contributed to the death of two people.

Acting PIO Damon Simmons was on duty during both of these events and he says PF&R's Arson Investigation Team's great work helped firm up resolution during these tragic events. "While their focus is always on accuracy, not speed, they were able to bring in partners such as ATF, PPB, OSP and Gresham Fire and work well with them to bring clarity to neighbors and family members," he says. "Additionally, with a high level of media interest around both cases, the team shared important information while balancing the delicate needs of the investigation."

PF&R's Arson Investigation Unit is considered one of the best in the country. The team's structure of having an embedded police detective (Det. Joe Luiz) within a crew of fire investigators trained and sworn by police to do arson investigations is considered an ideal configuration. Still, PF&R is the only department in the state with this structure.

"Most departments have investigators who hand off what they find to their police departments, which are not focused on arson," says Jason Andersen, an investigator who has been on the team since 2008. PF&R's structure is just one of the reasons why the department has a high case clearance rate, meaning they solve a good percentage of their cases.

Even though team members have seen a lot on the job, when asked about the week of July 23, Investigator Rick McGraw (the longest tenured team member), let out a sigh. "It's rare for us to get a double-fatality, but to get two back-to-back double fatalities is unbelievable," he says. His partner, Joe Luiz, chimed in, "And there was a double-homicide. Even one arson homicide is rare."

When one of the cornerstones of the Coggle strategic plan is zero fire deaths, a week with four fire deaths could be seen as a setback, but the investigators look at it differently.

#### Arson Team Stats for 2016

Fires investigated: **1,185**

Number of arsons: **300**

Number of arson arrests: **66**

Their work parsing out what happened can help save lives in the future. For example, at the scene of a fatality, they can often track elements of the environment that could have been manipulated to make the occupant safer, regardless of the fire cause: things such as working smoke alarms, closed bedroom doors, or building materials.

They can also reverse engineer these same things when they investigate a fire where people survived to show how they stayed safe. These pieces of information help inform public education campaigns, code creation, and even legislation.

Jason Andersen, who is a member of the Zero Fire Death Task Force, says that their work also ties into the health and wellness focus of the Coggle. Arson investigators are able to parse out things such as whether a fire death was exacerbated by someone being inebriated, disabled, or underage; all those elements create a picture of what the needs are in various neighborhoods.

The week of July 23 tested the arson investigation team's limits and they came through with the level of proficiency, efficiency, and professionalism that they are known for. But the team is quick to thank their partners and especially the firefighters on the line who step up to help them on not just these scenes, but many incidents. "Without their help, we could not do the job that we need to do," says Andersen.

## SOCIAL MEDIA MENTIONS



Ric Peavyhouse @RPeav... Aug 9

A @PDXFire firefighter helps a mother and her baby across the MAX tracks after their apartment caught fire this morning #LiveOnK2



Sunday Parkways @Sunday... 3d

Stop by Hazelwood Hydro Park at the @PDXFire's booth to learn safety tips and participate in CPR /AED demos.



NAMI Oregon @NAMIOregon 5

Our deepest thanks @PDXFire for putting out the fire at our intern's apt complex within minutes Tuesday and ensuring that all were safe!

Mention



Montavilla Community Center - Portland Parks & Recreation

added 2 new photos.

August 11 at 5:22pm

Like as Your Page

Thanks Portland Fire & Rescue for visiting our Daily Adventures campers today. We had so much fun! We still have spots available for the last two weeks of summer camp. Call (503)823-4101 to register.



Do you have a story about a PF&R cogglevation that would be great for this newsletter? Contact Caryn Brooks on the Communications Team caryn.brooks@portlandoregon.gov or 503-823-3714

