



Riverside County District Attorney

CRIMINAL CASE UPDATE

PAUL E. ZELLERBACH
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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John Hall
Senior Public Information Specialist
Contact: 951.955.8662

SERIAL ARSONIST SENTENCED TO 45 YEARS IN PRISON FOR STARTING NINE AREA FIRES

RIVERSIDE – Today, Sept. 5, 2014, a serial arsonist was sentenced to 45 years in state prison for setting a series of nine arson fires in Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

On July 31, 2014, Steven Taylor Rutherford, DOB: 7-12-65, of Banning entered guilty pleas to 10 felony counts of arson. Rutherford's arrest on June 28, 2013, was the culmination of a lengthy investigation by CAL FIRE arson investigators. He was connected to the series of arsons through law enforcement and commercial business surveillance cameras as well as lawfully placed GPS trackers on his vehicles.

Rutherford was initially charged with 13 counts, but three counts were dismissed as part of a plea agreement with prosecutors. Rutherford was sentenced today by Judge Becky Dugan at the Hall of Justice in Riverside.

"Serial arsonists like Mr. Rutherford present a continual danger and threat to everyone in the Inland Empire region," Riverside County District Attorney Paul Zellerbach said. "This sentence ensures that he will spend the rest of his life in prison and will no longer be a threat."

CAL FIRE/Riverside County Fire Department Chief John Hawkins, who attended the sentencing hearing with several other fire officials and arson investigators, said, "This was a great and successful effort by CAL FIRE and the DA's Office to put this recidivistic serial arsonist behind bars. The public deserves the best possible effort in cases like this and that is exactly what they received here."

One of the nine fires Rutherford intentionally started was the "Mills Fire" in San Bernardino County. Last year, DA Zellerbach and San Bernardino County District Attorney Mike Ramos agreed that the Riverside County DA's Office would prosecute the San Bernardino County case along with the other eight arson fires which occurred in Riverside County.

Rutherford was convicted of intentionally starting the following nine arson fires, listed chronologically:

- Sept. 6, 2011: "Twin Fire", Highway 243 at Twin Pines Road which burned about five acres
- Sept. 7, 2011: "Banning Fire", Highway 243, north of Mt. Edna Road, burning about 55 acres
- Sept. 11, 2011: "Summit Fire", Highway 74 at Mile Marker 55, burning about two acres
- Sept. 11, 2011: "Lambs Fire", Gilman Springs Road, east of Sanderson, burning about 35 acres
- Oct. 22, 2011: "Water Fire", Whitewater Canyon, north of Interstate 15, burning about 20 acres
- Oct. 22, 2011: "Free Fire", Mt. Edna Road, west of Highway 243, burning about 10 acres
- Sept. 9, 2012: "Edna Fire", Highway 243, south of Wesley Street, burning about four acres
- June 28, 2013: "Smith Fire", Highway 243, south of Banning near Mile Post 28, burning about five acres
- June 28, 2013: "Mills Fire", (San Bernardino County) Mill Creek Road at Newport Road in Mentone, burning about 534 acres and causing damage to four properties, including two homes

The loss in the nine arson fires is estimated to be \$1.16 million.

The case, RIF1305791, was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Amy Zeta.

3960 Orange Street, Riverside, CA 92501

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