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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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May 6-12 Arson Awareness Week in Mississippi State Supports 2007 Theme - "Vehicle Arson – Who Pays for This Crime?"

Jackson –Commissioner of Insurance and State Fire Marshal George Dale announced today that the Mississippi State Fire Marshal's Office, the Mississippi State Fire Academy, and the Mississippi Fire Investigator's Association will join the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the United States Fire Administration, and the International Association of Fire Investigators in promoting the week of May 6-12, 2007 as the 2007 National Arson Awareness Week and will support the national theme -" Vehicle Arson – Who Pays for This Crime?"

From January 2006 through April 2007, the Mississippi Fire Incident Reporting System shows that there were nearly 4,000 passenger vehicle fires in Mississippi. The State Fire Marshal's Office was called in to investigate 37 of those vehicle fires as arson and the investigations resulted in 18 arrests.

"Arson robs a community of its most valuable assets, lives and property. Since January 2006, vehicle arson fires in Mississippi have caused over \$750,000 in property damage. This is not a victimless crime, there are many pass along costs and can cause injury or death. We will continue to call attention to this problem and work with state and local authorities in finding ways to help prevent more cases from occurring," said Commissioner of Insurance and State Fire Marshal George Dale.

According to 2004 figures from the United States Fire Administration and the National Fire Protection Association, 36,000 intentionally set vehicle fires occurred, an increase of 18% from the previous year. Vehicle arson accounted for \$165,000,000 in property damage, an increase of 25% from the pervious year. Vehicle arson accounted for 29% of all arsons.

Steps that everyone can take to help reduce incidents of vehicle arson include:

- Park your car in a well-lit area
- Use a secure parking lot for extended periods
- Close all windows
- Remove the key from the ignition
- Always lock doors, trunk, and tailgate
- Use antitheft devices

- Report abandoned cars to the police

If you find yourself in a vehicle fire, here's what you should do:

- Get yourself and others out of the vehicle
- Call the fire department at 911 and tell the location of the fire
- Stay away from the vehicle – do not try to retrieve personal property
- Never put yourself in danger attempting to extinguish the fire yourself
- Do not open the hood or trunk if you expect a fire under it

Local fire departments, the State Fire Marshal's Office, the State Fire Academy and the Mississippi Fire Investigator's Association will be promoting vehicle arson awareness and general fire safety throughout the state.

For more information visit the State Fire Marshal's Office webpage on the Mississippi Insurance Department Website at www.doi.state.ms.us.

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