



CONTRA COSTA COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SERIAL ARSONIST CONVICTED BY CONTRA COSTA COUNTY JURY

James Bishop III Guilty, Awaiting Sentencing on 31 Counts Related to 2017 Fires in Antioch, Martinez, Pleasant Hill, Concord, Pittsburg, Walnut Creek, Lafayette, Brentwood and Benicia

CONCORD, CALIF., December 6, 2018 – On December 4, a Contra Costa County jury found defendant James Bishop, III of Pittsburg guilty of 31 arson-related felonies. Bishop was arrested in May 12, 2017 by the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Fire Investigation Unit, the Concord Police Department, and the Contra Costa County District Attorney's Office after a months-long investigation.

Bishop is currently incarcerated in the Martinez Detention Facility awaiting sentencing. Sentencing in the case is expected on January 25, 2019 in Contra Costa County Superior Court in Martinez. Bishop now faces a sentence of up to more than 20 years in state prison.

"Conviction of this dangerous arsonist who plagued our communities for many months comes as a result of a county-wide effort of our Fire Investigation Unit, the office of the Contra Costa County District Attorney, and numerous law enforcement agencies," said Jeff Carman, Fire Chief, Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. "In this County, we take fire investigation very seriously and I am especially proud of the teamwork of all involved agencies that has resulted in this arsonist who placed our citizens' lives and property in jeopardy being safely behind bars."

In the jury trial, begun in November 2018 in Contra Costa County Superior Court, Bishop was charged with 33 felony counts involving arson of an inhabited structure, arson of property, and the possession and use of an accelerant. Some 45 fires were examined over the course of the investigation with 14 of these resulting in the charges in the case. The fires occurred in Antioch, Martinez, Pleasant Hill, Concord, Pittsburg, Walnut Creek, Lafayette, Brentwood and Benicia.

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In the early months of 2017, the Con Fire FIU began noticing similarities in separate, unexplained vehicle fires throughout Contra Costa County, determining the vehicle fires were likely the result of a serial arsonist. These fires were set, in most cases, in vehicles adjacent to homes and, in one noteworthy case, in a vehicle immediately below the bedroom of sleeping children.

The arson task force contributing to arrest and conviction of Bishop also included the Concord Police Department, the Lafayette Police Department, the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office Crime Lab, California Highway Patrol and other local law enforcement agencies. Neighbors also provided crucial evidence to Con Fire investigators, in several instances sharing surveillance videos that captured a suspicious vehicle in the vicinity at the time of the fires.

Case information: People v. James Bishop III, Docket Number 05-171999-6.

See related Media Backgrounder for more.

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About Contra Costa County Fire Protection District

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District is a recognized fire service leader providing fire and emergency medical services to more than a million people across a 304 square-mile area, in and around the 20 cities of Contra Costa County, California. In 2017, the District responded to nearly 74,000 fire and EMS emergencies and provided expert medical care in the conduct of more than 75,000 ambulance transports. The District with 25 fire stations and nearly 400 employees is dedicated to the preservation of life, property and the environment.

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