



# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DATE:** *May 13, 2021*  
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## **Arson K-9 Joins Fire Investigation Team**

San Bernardino, CA – There’s a new dog in town. San Bernardino County Fire Protection District (SBCoFire) announces the launch of its first Arson Canine (K-9) Program in over 20 years. Dinty, a 4-year-old black Labrador Retriever, is now part of our elite investigative team.

This Program would not be possible without the partnership of State Farm. The State Farm Arson Dog Training Scholarship funds the \$25,000 estimated cost for acquiring one Arson Dog and sending one handler through the Arson Dog Program training and certification class in Concord, New Hampshire.

Dinty and his handler Fire Investigator Shawn Reiss recently returned from a 4-week training on the East coast; going through 200 hours of intense training led by the highly accredited Paul Gallagher, Owner and Head Trainer of Maine Specialty Dogs. Dinty is currently the only arson canine in San Bernardino County and one of five state-wide.

“SBCoFire investigators conducted 755 (FY19/20) fire investigations last year. Programs such as this are important tools in solving arson crimes and getting arsonists off the streets,” stated Fire Chief Dan Munsey. “Only departments selected by State Farm are invited to participate in their Arson Dog Program and we are honored to be one of them. We look forward to our continued partnership with State Farm and expanding our Arson Canine Program.”

According to the National Fire Protection Association, an estimated 280,000 intentional fires are reported to U.S. fire departments each year, with associated annual losses of 420 civilian deaths, 1,360 civilian injuries, and \$1.3 billion in direct property damage. The actual number of arson fires and the amount of property damage is likely much higher, as arson is an underreported crime. Arson dogs played a crucial role in determining the cause of many of these fires.

Arson dogs are accelerant detection canines, highly trained to sniff out minute traces of accelerants/ignitable liquids (gasoline, lighter fluid, etc.); crucial evidence at fire scenes, identifying the cause of the fire, assisting in cold crime cases, and uncovering potential evidence in arsons and homicides. To remain compliant and accredited, each handler and K-9 must complete a 2-day recertification class each year to confirm that the handler and canine are working together as a team and meeting standards of training.

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“Arson canines are an invaluable resource in arson investigations. Their senses are extraordinary, capable of hitting on a drop of accelerant and can detect flammable liquids over 100 times more accurately than electronic gas detectors,” stated Fire Marshal Mike Horton. “Dinty will be instrumental in helping investigators locate evidence that may assist in the identity and conviction of an arsonist.”

Dinty works and lives with his handler. The Arson Canine Program is a five-year commitment and comes with an annual cost estimated at \$16,000.

Fires and arsonists know no jurisdictional boundary and affects us all. SBCoFire is eager to share our new resource and look forward to assisting our fellow fire and law enforcement agencies regionally.

Fire Investigator Shawn Reiss said, “Dinty and I are ready to use the training we have received to assist with solving these hideous and deadly crimes. We are also looking forward to getting involved in community outreach programs that focus on fire prevention and safety.”

State Farm Insurance established the Arson Dog Program in 1993 to award scholarships for assistance with the problem of arson in our society. As provided by State Farm, Arson Dogs are an invaluable tool for fire and law enforcement officials to combat the costly and deadly crime of arson. Each year, billions of dollars in property and hundreds of lives are lost as a result of intentionally set fires. Since inception, the State Farm Arson Dog Program has placed more than 425 dogs in 46 states, three Canadian provinces, and the District of Columbia. All accelerant detection canine teams are trained by Maine Specialty Dogs and certified by the Maine State Police.

The Investigation Unit for the SBCoFD Office of the Fire Marshal (OFM), which is comprised of seven Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) qualified individuals, is a highly recognized regional investigations unit within the State of California. Other jurisdictions within the State request information on how the unit operates to model their units similarly. Among many of their responsibilities, the OFM Investigation Unit investigates the cause and origin of fires occurring within their jurisdiction, as well as other criminal and civil investigations.

A media Meet & Greet, and live demonstration is being planned for June.

#### **Additional Resources:**

- San Bernardino County Fire officials interview video, <https://vimeo.com/549044421/2f4148765a> .
- [Video](https://vimeo.com/542968869) b-roll of Arson dog Dinty and handler Shawn Reiss during recent training (<https://vimeo.com/542968869>).
- [Photos](https://www.flickr.com/photos/warriorwoman531/sets/72157719067167276/) of handlers & their K9s during recent training (Dinty page 5 & 6). Photos courtesy of State Farm (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/warriorwoman531/sets/72157719067167276/>).
- For more information about the Arson Dog Program, please visit [www.arsondog.org](http://www.arsondog.org).

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*The San Bernardino County Fire Protection District is an all-risk/full-service, premier Fire, Rescue and EMS department committed to providing the highest level of service in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. Our jurisdiction encompasses 19,278 square miles of extremely diverse environments that stretch from the Los Angeles, Riverside and Orange County lines to our south and west, to the Colorado River and Arizona to the east, and the Nevada State line and Kern and Inyo counties on the north. We provide services to more than 60 communities/cities and all unincorporated areas of the county.*