



EFFINGHAM POLICE DEPARTMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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JULY 1, 2024

EFFINGHAM MAN DETAINED ON AGGRAVATED ARSON CHARGE



On Sunday, June 30, 2024, at approximately 1:29 A.M., Effingham Police officers responded to a report of a structure fire in the Lakewood Manor Trailer Park. Upon arrival, officers observed a fire close to a trailer in the park which had spread to the exterior of the residence. Utilizing a fire extinguisher, officers were able to successfully smother the fire. The trailer was occupied by one adult and two young children at the time of the blaze, but there were no reported injuries as a result of the incident. Responding Effingham Fire Department crews used thermal imaging cameras to check the residence. Damage to the exterior of the residence was estimated at \$1,000.

Once the immediate threat of harm was mitigated, officers initiated an investigation into the incident, conducting a canvass of the area, interviewing potential witnesses, and collecting evidence from the scene. The initial investigation determined that the fire was set intentionally, which led to the arrest of Michael J. McWhorter, 46, Effingham. McWhorter was booked into Effingham County Jail at 3:52 A.M. for the following charge:

- **1 Count – Aggravated Arson**
 - **Aggravated Arson is a Class X Felony**
 - **Aggravated Arson carries a mandatory sentence of 6 to 30 years in prison**

Evidence obtained from the investigation indicated that this was a random act perpetrated by one person, and there is no additional threat to the community. McWhorter's initial hearing was held this morning, and the Court found the State had met its burden on their motion to deny Pre-Trial Release; McWhorter will be held without bail pending his next hearing on July 18, 2024 at 10:00 A.M.

Effingham Police were assisted by Effingham Fire Department as well as Effingham County Sheriff's Office and Rural Med EMS. The investigation into the arson is on-going.

Effingham Police Chief Jason McFarland praised both officers and firefighters, stating "The rapid response by both Effingham City officers and firefighters prevented what could have been a tragedy, given that this occurred in the middle of the night and a family was sleeping in the

affected residence. Because of that quick action and diligence, the person responsible for this act was immediately arrested and is now detained in Effingham County Jail.”

Highlighting the teamwork between the City’s Fire and Police Departments, Effingham Fire Chief Brant Yochum praised both agencies, remarking, “I would like to extend my gratitude to the police department for their seamless collaboration and support. The teamwork between our departments is crucial in both combating these fires and initiating a thorough investigation. Together, we remain committed to bringing those responsible to justice and ensuring the continued safety of our community.”

**ALL INDIVIDUALS LISTED AS ARRESTED OR ISSUED A CITATION ARE INNOCENT
UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY IN A COURT OF LAW**

If you see it, say it! The Effingham Police Department encourages you to call the Police Department immediately at 217-347-0774 to report suspicious activity in your neighborhood or business district. Information can be given anonymously by calling the CRIME STOPPERS Tip Line at 217-347-6583. Anonymous callers can receive up to \$1,000 cash rewards.