

Fires

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went as high as \$150,000, and included a tractor, various pieces of farming equipment and approximately 33,000 bales of hay and straw.

"It's a terrible thing," Gray says, recalling the hours he'd spent, and the labor paid out, to fill the five-bay barn with hay and straw. "Farmers have enough problems as it is without having their barns burned."

First fire reported was south of Stewartstown at 1:05 a.m., with that town's Eureka Company responding to the blaze at a barn owned by William Pyle. A car, boats, tractor and small amount of hay were reported lost at that Wiley's Station burning.

A portion of the Eureka Company, joined by forces from other neighboring companies, then answered the second report of a fire at the James Quesenberry barn, also in Hopewell Township.

The third report was of a barn on fire along Dutton Road in Shrewsbury Township, owned by George Yannakakis of Baltimore. From farther west in Shrewsbury Township came the fourth call, to a wagon shed on the property of Leo Keller, Waltmyer Road, New Freedom.

Quesenberry's and Yannakakis'

barns were both reported filled with hay.

Following the fifth report at the Gray property, a sixth fire call sent Baltimore County fire companies to battle flames in the barn owned by Marion Hale, on Stable Church Road. Reported lost in that blaze was a cornpicker and other farm equipment.

This latest series of suspected arson fires follows a "pattern" that residents say is typical of more than a dozen similar blazes in the past two years. Most have started during the early hours of the morning, in rural barns located near a road. On April 22, 1982, three barns burned in the Shrewsbury-Stewartstown vicinity.

Trooper Boyle suggests that rural residents pay careful attention to any suspicious cars they spot and record license numbers of strange vehicles.

"But you're talking about 1 or 2 a.m., when there aren't many cars out on the roads, or people to see what's happening," he adds.

While the open, accessible nature of barns makes them vulnerable, the use of security measures such as night lights, dogs, and locks on doors can add to the property's safety.

Investigators believe that in

several of the barn blazes, an incendiary device was tossed through a window. They recommend farmers screen barn windows that face roadways. Persons with any information

about the barn fires are urged to contact the Pennsylvania or Maryland State Police. A reward of up to \$5,000 is being offered by the Arson Hotline, a fund created

by several insurance companies. Persons with information can call the Hotline toll free at 1-800-462-0322.

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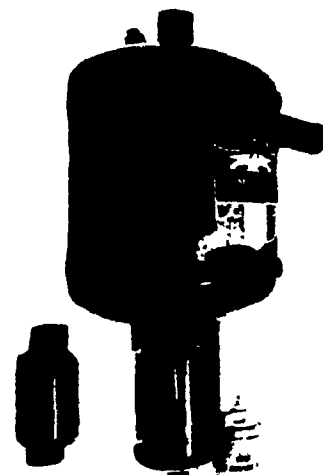
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