



# Department of Justice

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## **ARSONISTS WHO SET FIRE TO ADULT CLUB SENTENCED TO PRISON**

### *Defendants Worked for a Competing Adult Club*

ATLANTA, GA - BOYD SMITH, 41, of Atlanta, Georgia; SANDEO PABLO DYSON, 46, of Gainesville, Georgia; and HOWARD "BIT" THROWER, 52, of Alpharetta, Georgia, were sentenced today by Chief District Court Judge Julie E. Carnes relating to a conspiracy to burn down "Club Onyx," an adult entertainment establishment in Atlanta, just after New Year's Day 2007.

Acting United States Attorney Sally Q. Yates said, "These prison terms bring to a close a successful arson investigation involving local and federal authorities. While thankfully no one was hurt during the fire and its aftermath, the defendants in this case, in their senseless pursuit of financial gain, put the lives of innocent civilians and our brave firefighters at risk."

"Setting afire a rival business to gain a competitive edge is not only a threat to free enterprise; it is a crime of violence," said Special Agent in Charge Gregory Gant of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in Atlanta. "Every time an arsonist strikes a match, the loss of human life is a distinct possibility. ATF's arson enforcement efforts are directed toward preventing arson, providing effective post-incident response, and safeguarding our community from the impact of arson."

SMITH was sentenced to 5 years in prison to be followed by 3 years of supervised release. DYSON was sentenced to 5 years in prison to be followed by 3 years of supervised release. THROWER was sentenced to 3 years in prison to be followed by 3 years of supervised release.

According to Acting United States Attorney Yates and evidence presented in court: The investigation of this case began on January 2, 2007, when the City of Atlanta Fire Department and agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) responded to a fire at Club Onyx, an adult entertainment club at 1888 Cheshire Bridge Road in Atlanta. An internal surveillance system that was not destroyed by the blaze showed a male figure moving about the club after it had been locked and

alarmed by management. This individual can be seen starting the fire and then hurrying beyond the range of the cameras and out of the building. The owners of Club Onyx spent nearly \$1 million to rebuild the facility and had to keep the club shuttered for over six months.

For many months, investigators were unable to develop any leads on the arson. A break in the case occurred in August and September, 2007, when agents from the ATF and the FBI learned that THROWER was involved in the arson. From that lead, agents eventually determined that THROWER, who was a senior manager at Platinum 21, had conspired with SMITH, also a manager, and DYSON, head of security at Platinum 21, to burn Club Onyx. Club Onyx had recently begun to compete with Platinum 21. With revenues and profits collapsing, THROWER, SMITH, and DYSON decided that they must shut Onyx down. After discussing a variety of less extreme options, the conspirators settled on the arson plan in December 2006.

DYSON was paid \$5,000 by SMITH and THROWER to “do the burn,” which he executed on January 2, 2007, just after the last employees had left the building. The night before the fire, DYSON scaled the outside of Club Onyx and diverted the external security cameras so that they would not record his exit after the fire was started.

DYSON pled guilty on April 24, 2008. THROWER pled guilty on January 29, 2009. SMITH went to trial and was found guilty by a jury on February 25, 2009. DYSON and THROWER both testified at SMITH’s trial, as did several other Platinum 21 employees.

This case was investigated by Special Agents of the ATF and the FBI. Assistance has also been provided in this case by the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division and the Atlanta Fire Department.

Assistant United States Attorneys Zahra S. Karinshak and Robert C.I. McBurney are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact Sally Q. Yates, Acting United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is [www.usdoj.gov/usao/ga](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/ga).