



Department of Justice

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Western District of Texas

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ODESSA MAN SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON ON ARSON CHARGE

United States Attorney Robert Pitman announced that in Midland, 64-year-old Jimmie Doyle Farris of Odessa, Texas, was sentenced to six years in federal prison for a series of unexplained fire starts in the Permian Basin last summer.

In addition to the prison term, United States District Judge Robert A. Junell ordered that Farris pay \$3,951.40 restitution and be placed under supervised release for a period of three years after completing his prison term.

According to court documents, during the summer of 2011, the counties of Midland, Ector, Andrews, Winkler and Crane all experienced roadside fire starts that were unexplained by any possible accidental cause, such as a dragging chain or cigarette. More than a dozen of these fires from April 2011 to June 2011 had one common fact: Jimmie Doyle Farris. The fire marshals in the area became suspicious of Farris when he kept turning up at the scene of various fires. In some cases, Farris was the first to call 911 and report the fire. In other situations, ranchers and firemen personally observed Farris at the scene of the fire when they arrived, though he had no reason to be at those remote locations in the county. In one instance, Farris received a burn injury, was transported to the hospital from the scene, and later interviewed by a local television news crew. In that interview, Farris claimed to be a Good Samaritan by traveling around the area and looking for wildfires so that he can quickly notify the fire department.

With suspicions aimed directly at Farris, authorities placed Farris under surveillance. On June 15, 2011, Farris traveled directly from his residence to the rural oilfield of south Midland County where there had been multiple unexplained fire starts in the previous two weeks and where Farris had reported fires and been observed at others. Law enforcement officials observed Farris' vehicle turn onto an oilfield lease road on the Windham Ranch, and a few minutes later the nearest officer noticed smoke in the field where Farris had just stopped. Law enforcement descended upon Farris, placed him under arrest, and extinguished the fire before it got any closer to the pumpjack about a hundred feet away.

In April, Farris pleaded guilty to one count of maliciously damaging real property by means of fire. By pleading guilty, Farris admitted responsibility for the June 15, 2011, fire as well as seven other fires in south Midland County and Ector County between May 28, 2011 and June 15, 2011. Each fire was in very close proximity to a pumpjack, tank battery or oilfield poly line.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Texas Forrest Service and the Sheriff's Departments from the following counties: Midland, Ector, Andrews, Crane and Winkler. Fire Marshals from Midland and Ector counties also assisted in this investigation. Assistant United States Attorney Austin M. Berry prosecuted this case on behalf of the Government.

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