

number of cases involving small numbers of **fires**. Investigators continue to pursue the question whether broader conspiracies were responsible for some of the **fires**.

In still other **cases**, state prosecutions have been initiated in consultation with federal prosecutors or **investigators**. The NCATF actively monitors these prosecutions to ensure that any federal interest is vindicated and to ensure that accurate information is compiled regarding law enforcement's response to attacks on houses of **worship**.

**Continuing Workload.** Arson cases are among the most difficult criminal cases to solve. Forensic evidence is often destroyed with the **fire**. **Moreover**, because some of the churches burned are located in **isolated, rural areas**, there are often no eye witnesses to the **incident**. For these **reasons**, it can **often** take years to solve arson **cases**.

In **addition**, the NCATF has been initiating investigations as new fires have **occurred**. While the number of reported fires each month appears to have decreased from a peak in June 1996, there have been a substantial number of fires reported in each month since **June**. (See Appendix 2 for a chart of fires reported by **month**.) As of January 7, 1997, there were 221 pending investigations where arrests had not been **made**. The NCATF remains committed to **expending the necessary time**, resources and effort to solving these crimes and prosecuting those who are **responsible**.

#### **IV. Enhancing Arson Prevention Efforts.**

The NCATF, as part of the federal response to church **arson**, participates in a coordinated effort to enhance local and state programs to prevent fires at houses of worship and to promote arson awareness **generally**. The National Arson Prevention **Initiative**, spearheaded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (**FEMA**), has focused on coordinating federal resources to support community-based grass roots efforts to prevent **arson**.

- **Arson Prevention Clearinghouse.** In June 1996, **FEMA** established a Clearinghouse for arson prevention **resources**. To **date**, the Clearinghouse has received over 10,000 telephone inquiries from all 50 states and the District of **Columbia**, and responded to requests for over 300,000 packets of arson prevention **materials**. Included in those materials is the Church Threat Assessment **Guide** prepared by the NCATF, which informs congregations about steps they can take to make their church **safer**, as well as steps to take **after** an incident has **occurred**.