

Department of Justice

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MAN SENTENCED FOR ARSON AT DMV OFFICE

BUFFALO, N.Y.--The United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of New York announced today that Robert M. Vernon, 59, formerly of Fairfield Heights, State of New South Wales, Australia, who was convicted of commanding, inducing and procuring others to damage and destroy a building by means of fire, was sentenced to five years in prison and three years supervised release by Chief U.S. District Court Judge William M. Skretny. Judge Skretny also ordered Vernon to pay \$254,417.91 in restitution to the victims of the fire.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Timothy C. Lynch, who handled the sentencing, Vernon had a dispute with a Department of Motor Vehicles ("DMV") Automotive Facilities Inspector involving his used car businesses, Econo Motors and Variety Motors. On December 22, 2006, Vernon offered to pay an individual \$1,000.00 to set fire to a portion of a DMV building, located at 334 Dingens Street, Buffalo, which he believed contained the Inspector's files. Also on December 22, 2006, the defendant drove this individual past the DMV building and pointed out the area of the building that he wanted burned. That individual contacted another individual who, in turn, threw a Molotov cocktail into the building late in the evening on December 24, 2006. The resulting fire caused over \$250,000 damage to the DMV building and its contents.

The sentencing is the result of an investigation conducted by Special Agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Buffalo Field Office, under the direction of Resident Agent in Charge, Francis J. Christiano and Fire Investigators from the Buffalo Fire Department, under the direction of Fire Marshal Joseph Tomizzi. They were assisted in this investigation by members of the New York State Police and employees of the Department of Motor Vehicles.