



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF LOUISIANA STATE FIRE MARSHAL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS ARRESTED FOR MULTIPLE ARSONS

WEBSTER PARISH- The State Fire Marshal's Office has arrested two volunteer firefighters for three fires across two parishes.

Matthew Crane, 34 from Springhill, and Montana Ludlam, 23 from Cullen, both face one count each of Simple Arson, Simple Burglary and Criminal Conspiracy in Claiborne Parish. Additionally, the pair face two counts each of Simple Arson and Criminal Conspiracy in Webster Parish.

On June 22, the Claiborne Parish Sheriff's Office contacted the State Fire Marshal's Office to assist with determining the origin and cause of an abandoned house discovered burned down in the 800 block of Highway 808 in Haynesville.

None of the local fire departments had any reports of being notified of the fire. However, information about the fire possibly being intentionally set was provided to authorities, leading to the discovery.

The information suggested the house was set ablaze on June 18th by area firefighters in hopes of being dispatched to extinguish it. Crane and Ludlam, who joined the Shongaloo Fire Department in March, were identified as suspects in the case.

During the investigation, deputies learned of two other suspicious fires in the area around the same time frame. One of the fires was to a discarded couch near Dorcheat Bridge in Webster Parish the same night as the structure fire. The other was a grass fire on South Willow Road in Springhill a few days prior. Both of those fires were reported to the Shongaloo Fire Department for response.

Following an assessment of the Haynesville scene, that fire was deemed intentionally set. After additional investigative efforts, warrants for Crane and Ludlam were obtained.

Once in custody, Ludlam admitted his involvement in all three fires to SFM deputies.

Following Crane's surrender, he admitted his involvement in one of the fires as well as knowledge about the others.

Both men have been dismissed from the fire department.

“It’s disheartening to see people entrusted as public servants turn on the public they are supposed to protect with dangerous behaviors like these,” said State Fire Marshal Butch Browning, “While it is unfortunate to have to put firefighters behind bars for fire-related crimes, let this case serve as a warning to any other individuals with intentions of putting the public and their fellow firefighters in jeopardy for thrills. The State Fire Marshal’s Office will not tolerate these actions.”

The SFM would like to thank the community for their cooperation with this investigation and encourage others to submit anonymous tips to our agency if you have information about a fire-related crime in your area. Our arson hotline is 1-800-256-5452 or tips can be submitted on our website lasfm.org.

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