



# NEWS RELEASE

## OFFICE OF LOUISIANA STATE FIRE MARSHAL

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## FIREFIGHTER ARRESTED FOR EPPS BUILDING FIRE

**WEST CARROLL PARISH-** The State Fire Marshal's Office (SFM) has arrested an Epps volunteer firefighter for setting an abandoned building on fire.

James Travis "JT" Simmons, 26, was booked into the West Carroll Parish Jail on one count of Simple Arson and Obstruction of Justice.

Around 2 a.m. on Wednesday, April 1, the Epps Fire Department responded to the 4100 block of Highway 134 for a report of a vacant building fire.

After an assessment of the scene, SFM investigators determined the fire originated around a window at the front of the abandoned store. The resulting damage was minor.

Deputies also learned there were suspicions about one of the responding firefighters possibly removing evidence from the scene.

Following additional investigative efforts, Simmons was identified as a suspect in the case after SFM investigators discovered he placed the 911 call about the fire, but provided a different name to dispatchers.

In an interview with investigators, Simmons changed his story several times before admitting to setting the fire because when he passed by, he "thought the building needed to burn." He also admitted to removing evidence from the scene.

Simmons was then placed under arrest.

"It's never okay for someone to intentionally set a fire, but for a firefighter to do it, especially during this sensitive time of uncertainty surrounding the health of our communities, this was an especially egregious act," said State Fire Marshal H. "Butch" Browning, "We want to thank the Epps Fire and Police Departments for their partnership in this case. It's not easy seeing someone that stands alongside you to protect your community being held accountable for doing something to harm it."

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