

WEST MIDLANDS ARSON TASK FORCE

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The Effects of the Credit Crunch to Fire Reduction *(Getting ahead of the Curve)*

The West Midlands Arson Task Force (WMATF) was instructed by West Midland Fire Service (WMFS) and West Midlands Police (WMP) to carry out research in to the possible implications of the current financial recession with regard to future fire incidents and reduction of arson.

The WMATF worked in partnership with WMFS Statistics and Analysis Department and utilised research supplied by the WMFS Librarian. It was clear from the initial research that analysis could not accurately be carried out using WMFS statistics as recording formats and the large time span were not considered to be reliable for data. It was decided that national statistics would be used for the project.

The WMATF initially looked for other publications regarding the effects of the credit crunch and found The Credit Crunch and Regeneration: Impact and Implications report issued by the DCLG in January 2009 was a useful research document for this report.

The team agreed that further research into other factors surrounding the statistics was required as it was clear that some factors may have a larger effect on fires than the credit crunch recession in isolation. It was clear to see the difference that had been caused to incident statistics from the introduction of the ACF and the initial impact of work facilitated by their initial funding to help boost arson reduction projects.

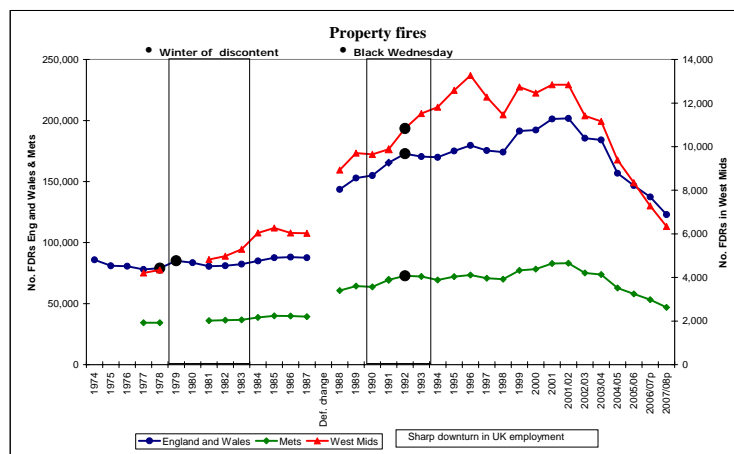
Recession Information



This current recession is clearly manifesting itself in a rise in unemployment and a reduction in the average house prices. This chart was produced to allow us to understand the previous recessions in 1980 and 1990 to allow a basis of comparison with today's changing economic climate.

Property Fire Statistics

We initially looked at national property fire statistics and realised that the WMFS and other metropolitan Brigades had similar statistics until 2003/4, so national factors were the predominant drivers changing all the statistics. After 2003/4 the variation in local arson and fire reduction projects are manifested in a variation of the reduction in property fire statistics. It is obvious that the work of the ACF and Arson Task Forces has made and continues to make a real difference to incidents since 2001/2.



Points to note:

The peak of fire incidents appeared to be 2/3 years after the recession. This recession has occurred when incidents are falling and not increasing as in previous recessions.

The West Midlands incident trends seem to be similar to the other UK

brigades and have clearly made a significant reduction since 2003/4.

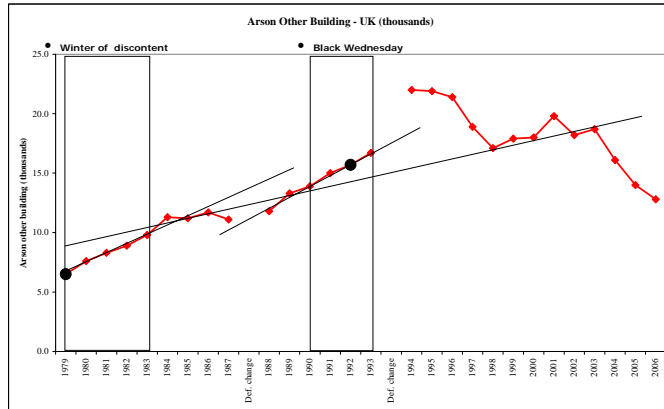
There was not an obvious significant increase of property fires during the last two recessions.

Arson – Other Buildings (Non- Dwellings)

The chart below was used to understand the effects to arson – other building (including businesses). There is a significant increase in incidents during the recessions which lead us to believe that if this recession was similar in duration and other related factors, the number of fires may well increase.

Points to note:

The previous recessions did cause increased pressure to the statistics
 The 1990 recession impact was larger than the 1980 recession
 A similar impact with current figures would not necessarily lead to an increase but may effect the rate of the current reduction trend
 We are not aware of any other influence that would affect the recession increases



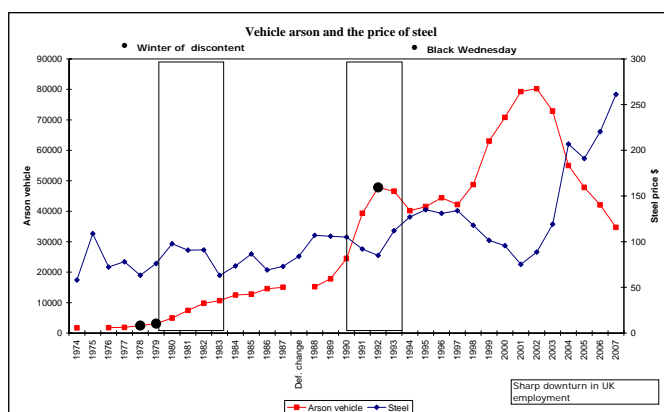
Possible reasons for the increase:

- A significant amount of businesses have stopped trading.
- A reduction in land/ property development.
- An increase in empty properties including public houses.
- Reduction in fire/ arson prevention activity by

businesses as cut backs are made

Arson - Vehicles

The chart below was used to understand the effects to arson – vehicles. From the chart below it is clear that until 1990 there was no direct influence of steel prices on vehicle arson, however since the last recession there seems to be a clear connection between an increase in steel price and a reduction in vehicle arson. At present the scrap steel prices are volatile and as such more cars could be abandoned and set on fire particularly if scrap merchants start charging to remove end of life vehicles.

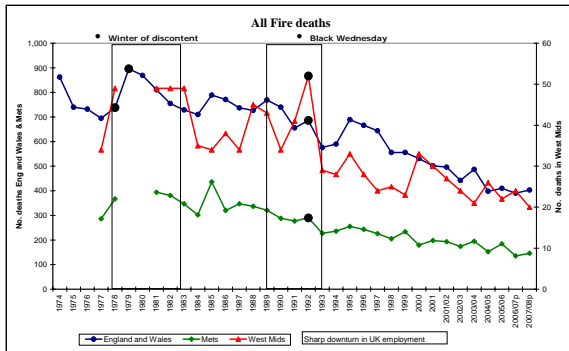


Points to note:

- Since 2003 Steel prices have increased and vehicle arson has reduced.
- Abandoned vehicles in the West Midlands are now removed quicker than in previous recessions and therefore not left to be ignited, vehicle arson should be reduced.

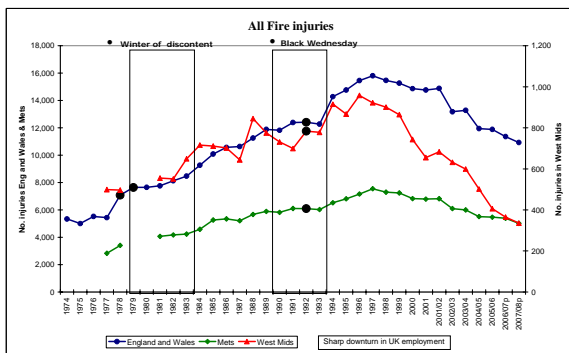
The USA steel price was used as the UK steel prices were not easily available

UK Fire Deaths



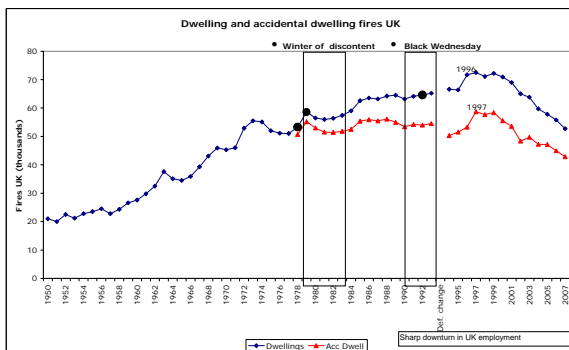
There does not appear to be any significant relationship between fire deaths and previous recessions, any reduction appears to be similar to the reduction between the recessions.

Fire Injuries



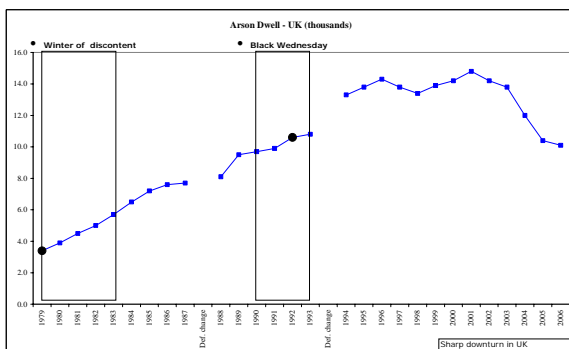
There does not appear to be any significant relationship between fire injuries and previous recessions, any increase appears to be similar to increases between the recessions.

Accidental Dwellings



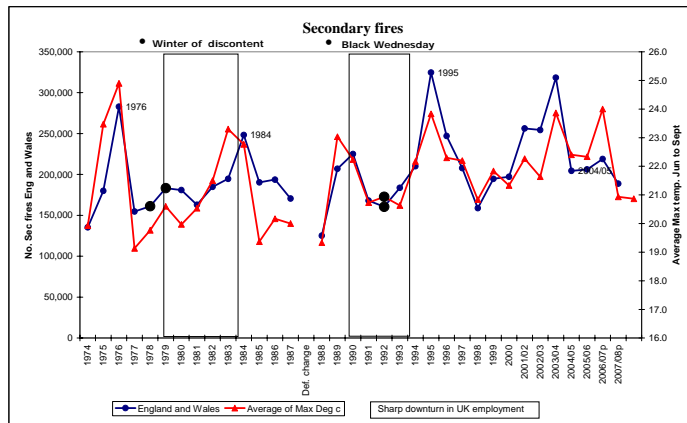
There does not appear to be any significant relationship between accidental dwelling fires and previous recessions, any increase appears to be similar to increases between the recessions.

Arson Dwellings



There does not appear to be any significant relationship between arson dwellings and previous recessions, any increase appears to be similar to increases between the recessions.

Secondary Fires

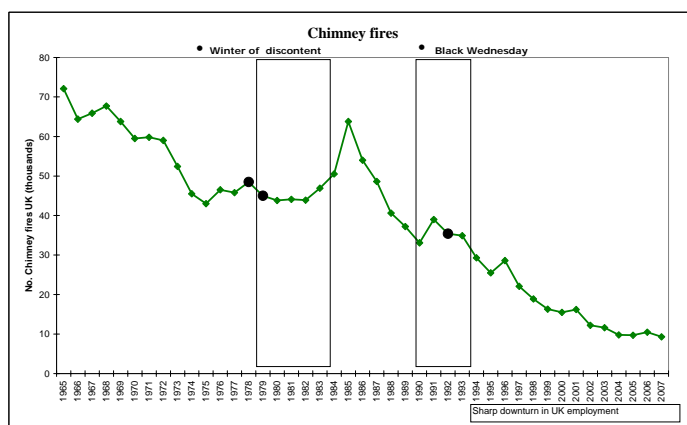


There does not appear to be any significant relationship between secondary fires and previous recessions. The average temperatures appear to have a far greater relationship to incident numbers however since 2005 fire reduction intervention appears has reduced the effect of temperature on secondary fire incidents.

Derelict Property Fires

We have seen no increase in derelict property fires in the West Midlands although we suspect a continued recession could cause an increase. We have made a determined effort to reduce fires in this area over the last two years introducing referral projects to inform the Local Authorities of high risk empty properties and working to prioritise properties that require intervention. We have seen a 15% decrease in incidents from 452 in 2007/8 to 383 in 2008/9. We were not able to carry out research because in the previous recession's derelict property fires formed part of the secondary fire figures.

Chimney Fires



Recent West Midland region (Staffs, Shrops, H&W and Warks) statistics, suggest the current credit crunch may cause an increase in chimney fires as more people turn to cheaper solid fuel fires instead of using conventional gas and electricity. The WMFS recorded a reduction in chimney fires of 5% comparing 2008/9 with

2007/8 however as a region there was a 27% increase; this variation is probably due to the differing housing demographics of the region. The 1990 recession does appear to have had a detrimental effect increasing the number of chimney fires which returned back to the continued reduction of incidents after the recession.

Conclusion

It was not possible to forecast the effects of this recession with any degree of accuracy as any recession has different affects on the economy including:

Unemployment
Share Prices
Value of domestic and commercial properties
Inflation
Cost of borrowing
Availability of borrowing

The research suggests that the current recession may have a detrimental effect to the number of incidents of other building arsons, vehicle arsons and chimney fires based on previous recessions.

There are fire and arson reduction initiatives currently in place which would not have been in place during previous recessions and these may reduce the potential for the levels of increase previously experienced.

Recommendations

Detailed research is recommended and will be easier to carry out in the future due to the changes in the recording of incidents.

The ACF should publish up to date UK fire statistics and not be two years out of date making current research very difficult.

The ACF should carry detailed information on their web site regarding the other factors that affect fire statistics such as unemployment, average house prices, temperatures etc.

Further intervention is required to reduce non – dwelling, vehicle arson and chimney fires.

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