

Serial Arsonist Gets 34 Years in Prison After Family Dog Dies in an Intentionally Set House Fire

On September 20, 2023, Marion County Circuit Court Judge Jennifer Gardiner sentenced Carl Wesley Sandberg (Sandberg) to a total of 412 months (34 years) in the Oregon Department of Corrections.

In early 2019, Carl Wesley Sandberg went on crime spree in Marion County. His criminal activity included not only burning a church and stealing a firearm, but numerous homes and businesses throughout Marion County were burglarized, as well. In some instances, the victim's identification, along with their credit cards, were used by Sandberg, causing multiple victims to suffer severe financial losses. In two instances, the homes Sandberg set fire to, in an attempt to cover up his crimes, had pets within the homes who ultimately perished in the fires. Several law enforcement agencies in Marion County worked together closely to identify Sandberg as the perpetrator, ultimately leading to his arrest.

The Marion County District Attorney's Office brought charges against Sandberg in in September of 2019 in a 22-count indictment; however, Sandberg went through 6 lawyers, for various reasons, delaying his case each time a new attorney was appointed. Finally, in May and August of 2023, Sandberg was brought to justice.

Sandberg's case was handled in two separate trials by Marion County Deputy District Attorneys David Wilson and Michael Thornicroft. For Deputy District Attorney David Wilson, "The effect these crimes had on the victims was significant. Families lost their mementos, their companion animals, and the sense of security that they once had in their homes. Also, an entire church congregation was displaced from their place of worship because of this one man's selfish decisions." Deputy District Attorney Michael Thornicroft, the last one to prosecute Sandberg said, "This is something the victims have not gotten over. It still haunts them. Property can be replaced, but a pet cannot. The jurors got to see pictures of the family pets in happier times. It was very emotional for the jury, as well as the victims."

Many of Sandberg's victims were able to share with Judge Gardiner just how devastating Sandberg's actions were. For one family in particular, they lost their family pet in the house fire Sandberg started. In their words, "Joe was our beloved dog and had been with my husband since Joe was a puppy. When I met my husband, Joe became my best friend too. He slept in our room every night, cuddled as close as we would let him. He came on all our hiking, camping, and whitewater rafting adventures. He was our first 'kid.' The agony I still feel about how afraid he was; how he suffered. I feel so much guilt and regret that he was alone. I never got to say goodbye." The loss for this particular family did not end there. Their

credit was destroyed because of Sandberg's use of their identity. They lived in hotels and rental homes while their home was rebuilt and their insurance premiums have increased dramatically because of all their losses. While years have passed since Sandberg's actions, they are still feeling the effects of his crimes.

Sandberg, who had been arrested 29 times in Oregon prior to this case, had criminal convictions dating back to 2004. His criminal history includes multiple convictions for forgery, burglary, theft, resisting arrest, assault, DUII, tampering with a witness, attempting to elude a police officer, unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, along with many others.

The Marion County District Attorney's Office would like to thank the Salem Police Department, as well as the Marion County Sheriff's Department for their dedication and professionalism. This investigation required a lot of resources and time.