

Governor Seeks Safeguards After Arson Evidence Lost

By TERRY GANEY
Jefferson City Commission of the Post-Dispatch

JEFFERSON CITY, Oct. 8 — Gov. James E. Touchette has asked the state's public safety director to review the establishment of the state fire marshal's office of a system to ensure investigation of evidence in arson cases.

Touchette's action came after an investigation by the public safety director which revealed that the state fire marshal's office is responsible for losing evidence in arson cases.

Touchette said that a report on the investigation had made clear that there had not been "a set procedure for the proper handling of evidence" in the fire marshal's office since 1974.

Touchette said Friday in a letter to Public Safety Director William E. Carnes, "Therefore, I requested that you approve the state fire marshal in establishing an efficient system to maintain the integrity of the chain of custody required by courts of law."

Howard County Prosecuting Attorney Patrick Conroy charged that the evidence had been lost or destroyed by state Fire Marshal James J. Belling. Belling denied the charge, saying that he had not heard the evidence lost or destroyed in the office when he took over in April.

Carnes ordered the investigation. A report delivered to Touchette last week had been written during a time in which the state fire marshal's office had been reorganized. Carnes said he had ordered Belling to improve evidence handling procedures.

Carnes said Belling should have taken steps to ensure himself with evidence procedures in the office, but he added, "I don't think he's done anything that warrants his being fired." Carnes said he had ordered Belling to improve evidence handling procedures.

When a reporter inquired the office's evidence since Sept. 16, he found no exhibits — one closed with a piece of wire — filled with several unsealed paper bags and boxes, pieces of charred material and empty, unsealed gasolin cans.

Since the loss of the evidence in the Howard County case, Belling has said he has not seen any of the exhibits and he has not seen any of the exhibits and he has not seen any of the exhibits.

Carnes summarized Belling to the fire marshal's year in office. Belling, fired by Robert L. Morrison, at the time of the investigation, Belling was a bookkeeper in the office of then St. Louis Liaison Catherine Brumley in June.

The appointment was criticized by some officials.

Belling had been dismissed as Criminal Justice chief three years ago, and he added, "I don't think he's done anything that warrants his being fired." Carnes said he had ordered Belling to improve evidence handling procedures.

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A Way To Dodge Sunshine Law?

By TERRY GANEY
Jefferson City Commission of the Post-Dispatch

JEFFERSON CITY, Oct. 8 — State Senator Kenneth J. Balthus (Dem.) has asked for an Attorney General's opinion on whether public officials and organizations that have nonprofit corporations to carry out their official duties are exempt from the state's Open Meetings Law.

Balthus requested the opinion Friday from Attorney General John D. Ashcroft, saying that the law is unclear.

The need for a clarification of the Open Meetings Law is a result of the fact that many public officials and organizations have formed nonprofit corporations to carry out their official duties.

Balthus said that the law is unclear because it does not specify whether the law applies to nonprofit corporations that are formed for the purpose of carrying out the official duties of public officials.

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County Board Upholds Dismissal Of Patrolman

Edward P. Fitzgerald has lost round one in a fight to get the job back as the St. Louis County Police Board on Friday upheld the dismissal of Patrolman Edward P. Fitzgerald.

The board of seven members of the County Board of Police Commissioners on Friday upheld the dismissal of Patrolman Edward P. Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald, who was a patrolman and a 15-year veteran of the County Police force, had been dismissed for allegedly using a handgun to threaten a woman.

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12 Automobiles Pile Up On Wet Memorial Drive

Twelve automobiles piled up in a head-on accident on Memorial Drive near Pine Street Saturday morning.

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Corrections

Christopher Williams has been named acting director of solid waste and demolition in St. Louis. He was identified incorrectly in yesterday's edition of the Post-Dispatch as acting director of solid waste and housing administration.

Williams' new duties will put him in charge of managing and supervising the city's solid waste and housing administration.



CHEMISTRY LAB BLAST: Part of the chemistry laboratory at Hazelwood West Junior High School where an explosion about midnight Friday injured four custodians. The school is at 6247 Hazelwood Road. (Post-Dispatch Photos by Dave Reager)

Blast Hurts 4 School Custodians

Four custodians were injured about midnight Friday in an explosion in a chemistry storage area adjacent to a chemistry laboratory at Hazelwood West Junior High School, 6247 Hazelwood Road.

Police said that four custodians were injured in the explosion. The explosion occurred in the storage area where the explosion occurred.

The other three custodians — Lawrence Ginn, 34, 1700 Olive Drive, Florissant; and James H. ...

Bombing Of Automobile Puzzles Victim

Nothing like this has ever happened in the history of St. Louis, Missouri, as a car was blown away from its owner's driveway by a bomb on Friday morning.

The victim, a 40-year-old man, was sitting in his car when the explosion occurred.

Catholic Teachers Approve Contract With No Pay Increase

Two years ago, teachers in the Cahokia School District voted to accept a 15 percent pay hike over a two-year contract. But they were not satisfied with the increase.

The teachers' union has approved a new contract with no pay increase.

Out Grown Baby

A 12-month-old baby was found in a car on Memorial Drive near Pine Street Saturday morning.

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