

# Big Lake Police Department

# News Release



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160 Lake Street North, Big Lake MN, 55309

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**Incident Number:** N/A

**Date/Time:** 3/13/2014

## Vehicle Fire Results in Criminal Charges

On 04/26/13 at about 9:30 a.m. members of the Big Lake Fire Department along with a Big Lake Police Officer were dispatched to a vehicle fire in the 100 block of Jefferson Boulevard in Big Lake. On their arrival, firefighters and officers were directed to a 2008 Cadillac Escalade in a parking lot. The vehicle had a cracked windshield, and blackened windows from smoke inside. The vehicle owner was in the immediate area, he was identified as James Berthiaume (Age 67 – Big Lake).

While extinguishing the fire, a Captain with the Big Lake Fire Department observed several pieces of partially burned newspaper crumpled and stuffed up under the dashboard. A member of the State of Minnesota Fire Marshall's Office was requested for a formal investigation into the cause of the fire. The investigator from the Fire Marshall's Office was the lead investigator in this incident, an Investigator from the Big Lake Police Department was assigned to assist him.

Closer investigation revealed the dates on the newspaper was recent to the time of the fire. Burn patterns indicated that the source of the fire was under the driver's side dashboard, at the location of the newspaper. It was the conclusion of the Fire Marshall that the fire was intentionally set. The original cost of the vehicle was \$45,000 in 2009, a claim for \$35,000 was submitted by the Berthiaume. An assigned insurance investigator also concluded the source of the fire to be the newspaper, an electrical source of ignition was ruled out.

James Berthiaume has been charged in Sherburne County District Court with one count of 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree Arson (Felony).



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