

Maine joins national arson tracking system

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AUGUSTA — Maine has become the first state in the nation to sign on to a new federal bomb and arson tracking system.

The system, run by the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, allows state, local and federal law enforcement agencies to share information about bomb and arson investigations.

State Fire Marshal John Dean said fire officials are now able to input details of their investigations into computers and share the information with other agencies to determine if there are similarities in cases. They can create maps to electronically pinpoint arsons that may be connected, Dean said.

"I'm very excited about it; it's nice to have a system designed specifically for the kind of work we do," Dean said.

Maine was one of several pilot sites chosen for the program along with sites in Arizona, Virginia, Oklahoma and Texas.

Dean said Maine's fire investigators helped develop the system using a federal grant to obtain lap-top computers .

"I believe it's going to pay big dividends," Dean said. □