

## 4 CHARGED IN ECO-TERROR ' 99 ARSON AT MSU , LOGGING BLAZE UP NORTH

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EAST LANSING - It wasn't your run-of-the-mill **arson** .

Michigan State University President Lou Anna Simon said Tuesday that it was much more.

And the four people, including three Detroiters, who authorities announced indictments against Tuesday for setting the fire **in** an agricultural research building on New Year's Eve 1999 didn't have the usual profit motive.

Their goal, authorities said, was to make a statement on behalf of the radical environmental group Earth Liberation Front (ELF).

"It was an assault on a core value of free and open inquiry **at** a research university," Simon said. "Once you the chill the academic climate from doing this kind of work, the cost to society is enormous."

For eight years, investigators persisted. They traveled across 10 states to unravel the **MSU** crime, as well as a separate incident a day later **in** northern Michigan, involving the burning of equipment used for logging.

The **MSU** fire caused \$1.1 million **in** damage and destroyed records of a genetic engineering project to boost crops **in** developing countries, **MSU** officials said Tuesday.

Simon and **MSU** police were joined by the FBI and U.S. attorneys who announced the arrests of the four people and their link to ELF.

ELF is a radical group with a history of destroying property, often by **arson** , to deter residential developments and activities the group considers harmful to the environment.

Those indicted from Detroit are Frank Ambrose, 33, Aren Burthwick, 27, and Stephanie Fultz, 27. Marie Mason, 46, was arrested **in** Cincinnati.

Mason and Ambrose face four counts of felony **arson** . They could be sentenced from 7 to 40 years **in** prison.

The pair, formerly married, have a history of environmental activism and arrests. Mason was arrested **in** Flint during a rowdy protest **in** 2003 **at** a Meijer store, where protesters attempted to prevent it from stocking Ice Mountain water.

Burthwick and Fultz face two **arson** counts, and from 5 to 20 years **in** prison.

All four were either **in** custody or awaiting arraignment Tuesday, officials said.

The indictment describes an almost comic scene **at** the **MSU** building, where Mason's hair was accidentally set on fire as Ambrose lit a fuse to a crude gasoline bomb and caused an explosion. Mason cut short her spray-painting slogans with black paint, as the two fled the scene into the cold night, the indictment said.

The next day, Mason and Ambrose met Burthwick and Fultz **in** Empire, near Traverse City, where they plotted to burn commercial logging equipment **in** Mesick, according to the indictment. There, Fultz cut Mason's fire-singed hair short.

Upon setting fire to the equipment, Fultz spray-painted a flatbed truck with the words, "ELF" and "Go Log **in** Hell."

**MSU** officials said although the fire **at** Agriculture Hall caused extensive damage, it did not destroy the research materials that were targeted, but rather ruined research records.

FBI agent Andrew Arena, of the agency's Detroit office, led the investigation. He called the arrests significant **in** attempts to blunt homegrown terrorism **in** the United States, especially given the eight years it took to indict.

"We sent a message to these people that time will not deter us," Arena said.

**In** early 2001, Ambrose was **charged in** Indiana with driving 10-inch nails into trees **at** a logging site to discourage tree-cutting - an act attributed to ELF. Ambrose denied spiking the trees, and the charges were dropped without explanation.

Investigators Tuesday would not comment on whether any of the four are suspects **in** other property crimes. **In** 2003, Ambrose and Mason were ordered to give DNA samples to federal investigators who suspected them of attempting to bomb the Ice Mountain bottled water plant near Big Rapids.

An unexploded bomb was found **in** an Ice Mountain pumping station, and ELF immediately took credit. No one has been **charged in** the case, and Buck Davis, a Detroit attorney who represented the pair but does not now, said they did not plant the bomb.

Davis, a longtime civil rights attorney, described Ambrose and Mason as "serious environmentalists and water rights activists." **In** 2002, ELF claimed responsibility for the **arsons** of luxury homes under construction **in** Macomb and Washtenaw counties.

Mason told the Free Press **in** 2003 that she was a chemist who left corporate life to work **in** an animal hospital.

Burthwick's name was listed on a Web site and **in** a 2006 newsletter as a maintenance employee of the Cass Corridor Neighborhood Development Corp. No one answered the phone **at** the CCNDC offices late Tuesday afternoon.

Burthwick's father, Warren, started the annual Dally **in** the Alley street fair **in** the Cass Corridor **in** the mid-1970s, which drew up to 30,000 people and raised money for beautification projects. He died **in** 2002.

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