



Arson attacks on Telecommunications sites

Introduction

Reports of criminal damage are increasingly being picked up and reported by national and local media. A snapshot of the extent of this can be seen in appendix A.

This briefing is intended to convey;

1. the current obtainable national picture around the recent trend of targeted attacks to Telecommunications sites, and
2. recommendations for the NFCC and individual FRS to consider.

Data Quality

Data returns have been received from 42 FRSs, with the NPCC providing the national policing overview. Each return has been validated through respective Data Quality processes embedded in FRSs and through the NPCCs Arson Lead via the national crime database.

Background

The UK telecommunications network consists of circa 44,000 telecommunications masts and associated equipment that provides essential connectivity for everyone's daily life; supporting the UKs security, economic development and daily business operations.

During the current pandemic working arrangements, these networks are essential for business continuity arrangements employed by the NHS, emergency services and all other responders supporting the ongoing national efforts.

5G represents the fifth-generation of the wireless telecommunication technology that smartphones and other devices use for communication and connecting to the internet.

5G networks are being rolled out across the world. Within this rollout some countries have specifically banned the use of Huawei's products within the 5G build programme, others are phasing out already installed components of the infrastructure network over security concerns, the UK have restricted Huawei from contributing core parts to 5G technology.

Conspiracy theories and false claims centred on new technologies have been made for years. Previous speculation has been levied that 5G masts cause Cancer, damages DNA, and causes premature aging. These claims are not restricted to the UK, with overseas campaign '**Say NO to 5G**' previously headlining these links.

More recent claims are being linked to the outbreak and spread of Covid-19.

As a communication platform, Social Media has worldwide reach and connectivity. In March alone, YouTube's top 10 most popular coronavirus conspiracy videos were viewed over 5.8 million times.

Since 5G was linked to Coronavirus, calls for burning the masts have sprung up on social media sites with subsequent videos showing them on fire uploaded to Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

An established 'Fire League Table' was found to be running a 'Burn your 5G mast competition' by local football team area. This has since been taken down from Facebook and is no longer available.

Acts of vandalism have also been encountered, alongside verbal and physical abuse of Telecommunications Engineers, and criminal damage to their vehicles and equipment being experienced when attending sites to diagnose and rectify reported faults.

Actions taken

Through liaison with the NPCC Arson Lead; Assistant Chief Constable Andy Prophet, the NPCC;

- are satisfied that regional intelligence monitoring is in place on this emerging issue
- have provided data on incidents of criminal damage recorded on the national crime database
- are raising awareness of the developing issue amongst Forces and reiterating the need for effective local investigations including key links with local FRSs.

Through liaison with Regional NILO; Chris Hannah, West Yorkshire;

- regional NILO notification has taken place which indicated that not all NILOs or Serious & Organised Crime Groups were sighted on this emerging issue
- confirmation has been received that this is not a Counter Terrorism issue and that there is no intelligence of a coordinated threat / attack, incidents should be considered as a criminal act.

Through liaison with Home Office Fire & Resilience Directorates' Stats Team, Kenneth Luther;

- the developing issue has been highlighted, who have liaised with the Crime Stats Team
- the Fire Stats Team have conducted a search on IRS however difficulties were encountered with incident identification due to no standardised category existing. A manual search of IRS has been undertaken which is unreliable due to the variable quality and extent of the information provided by FRSs, data returned could not be guaranteed therefore individual FRS validated data has been collected directly
- the Department of Culture & Media has been informed of the developing issue.

Through contact with individual FRSs;

- the developing trend has been raised
- validated data from England, Wales and Scotland has been obtained for attendance at fires at Telecommunications sites from the 1st March 2020 to date (see appendix B) and used to map the incident distribution (see appendix C)
- contact has been made to the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service's sponsoring Department; The Department of Health, and validated data included.

Extent of issue

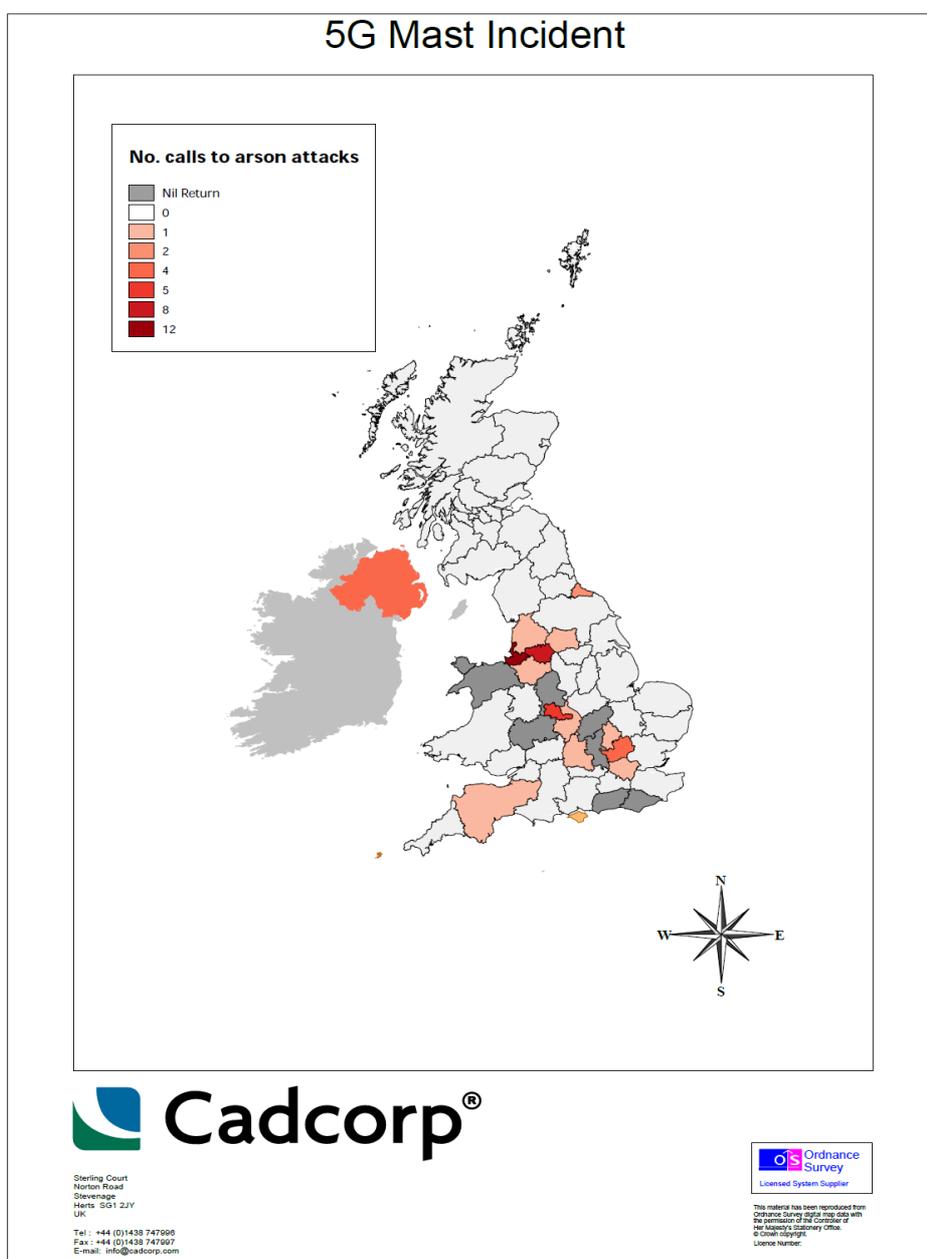
From a policing perspective;

36 incidents have been recorded across the UK during the period 1st March – 14th April. A Senior Investigating Officer is being appointed to coordinate these investigations.

From a Fire perspective;

43 fires have been attended during the period 1st March – 14th April. (Could be slightly higher due to small number of outstanding FRS responses). From the dates of fires attended, the peak of these arson attacks appears to have passed and numbers are now declining as shown in appendix D.

The UK map below shows the national fire incident distribution, with hotspots in Merseyside and Greater Manchester. West Midlands and Northern Ireland are developing.



Potential impact

Working on the current extent, the scale of this issue is not likely to present a demand issue for FRSs.

The current scale and ad-hoc targeting does not suggest that a national or total loss of communications is likely across the UK communications network. Loss of the ability to transmit or repeat (relay) could cause disruption to regional and local communications.

This could escalate and have wider impacts if key transmission or repeater sites were simultaneously attacked in a more coordinated manner.

The knock-on effects of temporary or permanent loss of a Telecommunications site could pose localised issues with Airwave, incident mobilisation and communications, and Business Continuity arrangements for emergency services.

The majority of the 44,000 telecommunications sites are unstaffed, many are in remote locations and those that are in built up areas are afforded little security and are easily accessible.

A potential does exist for the temporary or permanent loss of a Critical National Infrastructure site should it be subject to an attack.

The current pandemic working arrangements for the majority of the UK sees the majority of people operating and communicating from home. There is an associated loss of this ability in any areas where sites are lost. This could pose operating difficulties for FRSs and Regional / Local Resilience Forums disrupting their current mode of coordinating operations.

Public disorder and violence to FRS staff attending these fires does pose a potential threat. This has been experienced by Telecommunications Engineers who have attended to effect repairs. Damage to appliances and equipment is a possibility whilst FRSs attempt to deal with a fire.

Recommendations

National;

- 1) NFCC to encourage Public Health England to issue public statement of reassurance to dismiss links between 5G infrastructure and the spread of Covid-19
- 2) Home Office Department of Culture & Media, be requested to liaise with the National Security Secretariat to determine the need and feasibility of removing sensitive information on internet sites that freely provide the locations of 5G masts and Telecommunications sites including;
 - www.apwireless.co.uk
 - <https://coverage.ee.co.uk/coverage/ee>
 - http://www.three.co.uk/Discover/Network/Coverage?id=1681&awc=10210_1586962691_a6f041107d87179a0247f36a89c32b0c&aidset=1
 - https://www.o2.co.uk/coveragechecker?cm_mmc=affiliate-_-78888-_-blank-_-blank&awc=3242_1586962789_360e0481dea224622bae346877be2f5a
 - www.mastdata.com

- 3) The NFCC to determine the need for the national Joint Intelligence Organisation to be sighted on the developing issue, for the possible completion of an all-source assessment on the potential impact on national security, and any liaison with Social Media providers (Facebook etc.) to potentially take down
- 4) Home Office Department of Culture & Media be requested to determine any CNI sites and work with respective sites to ensure any vulnerability is reduced, security is in place or enhanced
- 5) Home Office Department of Culture & Media be requested to identify any additional key transmission or repeater sites / masts, and again work with those providers to reduce vulnerability
- 6) Information from 4 and 5 above to be fed into the National Communications & Resilience Group and the Home Office Fire COVID-19 Ops team, for information and detailed determination on the potential impact to FRSs on any of these being attacked or lost
- 7) The NPCC be requested to provide direction to respective Forces & Regional Serious & Organised Crime Groups as to sites in 4 and 5 above, to include these in local intelligence briefings for any actions they can provide under the National S&OC Strategy (Prevent-Protect-Prepare-Pursue)
- 8) Incident Recording System be expanded to include a sub category in 'outdoor structures' for Telecommunications masts. This will facilitate accurate ongoing recording.

Recommendations (cont.)

Local

- 1) Individual FRS affected should escalate the developing issue to LRF Strategic Coordinating Groups for assessment and potential inclusion on Risk Registers during the current Covid-19 pandemic
- 2) Local area Serious & Organised Crime Groups should be notified of the developing issue through FRS NILOs
- 3) FRSs should notify Local Police Forces and endeavour to coordinate a local approach to monitor all incidents of targeted crime to these types of sites (criminal damage including fire and malicious acts of vandalism)
- 4) FRSs should ensure a joint approach to the investigation of all fires at these sites.
- 5) FRSs should issue workforce communications to ensure staff safety; with the potential hazards of electricity and violence to staff reiterated.

Appendixes

- A Media coverage snapshot
- B Validated FRS data
- C Hotspot mapping of incidents
- D Arson attacks by date

15th April 2020

**AM Steve Johnson
NFCC Arson Lead**

APPENDIX A

Coronavirus 5G Mast Theory – Media Coverage

Source	Brief overview	Link
ITV	Mediacac Chief says mast virus claims are utter rubbish	https://www.itv.com/news/2020-04-04/5g-mast-coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-complete-and-utter-rubbish-states-medical-chief/
Guardian	At least 20 mobile masts vandalised over false virus claims	https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/apr/06/at-least-20-uk-phone-masts-vandalised-over-false-5g-coronavirus-claims
BBC	Mast fire probe over virus claims	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-52164358
Times	Arsonists blame phone masts for virus	https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/coronavirus-more-phone-masts-attacked-as-arsonists-blame-5g-7xpb1c9nd
Sky	NHS Director slams conspiracy theories	https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-celebrities-criticised-for-fanning-the-flames-of-5g-conspiracies-11968570
Telegraph	Plea to halt mast virus theories	https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/04/masts-set-fire-prompt-warnings-5g-coronavirus-conspiracies/
Mirror	BT urges vandalism of masts to stop	https://www.mirror.co.uk/tech/bt-urges-public-not-vandalise-21819620
Independent	How baseless theory came about	https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/5g-coronavirus-conspiracy-theory-china-online-twitter-facebook-a9450001.html
Ofcom	Ofcom say no links between virus and masts	https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/features-and-news/ofcom-update-on-5g-vandalism
PoliticsHome	Downing Street slams crazed conspiracy theory	https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/downing-street-slams-crazed-conspiracy-theory-linking-coronavirus-with-5g-masts
Business Insider	Businesses slam mast virus theories	https://www.businessinsider.com/coronavirus-conspiracy-5g-masts-fire-2020-4?r=US&IR=T
Science Alert	Radiation has nothing to do with spread of virus	https://www.sciencealert.com/5g-radiation-has-nothing-to-do-with-the-spread-of-coronavirus
Kent Online	University professor brands virus claims as ridiculous	https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/5g-expert-rubbishes-ridiculous-and-impossible-conspiracy-theories-225311/
Stroud News	Coronavirus phone masts	https://www.stroudnewsandjournal.co.uk/news/18369253.coronavirus-5g-mobile-phone-masts-xr/

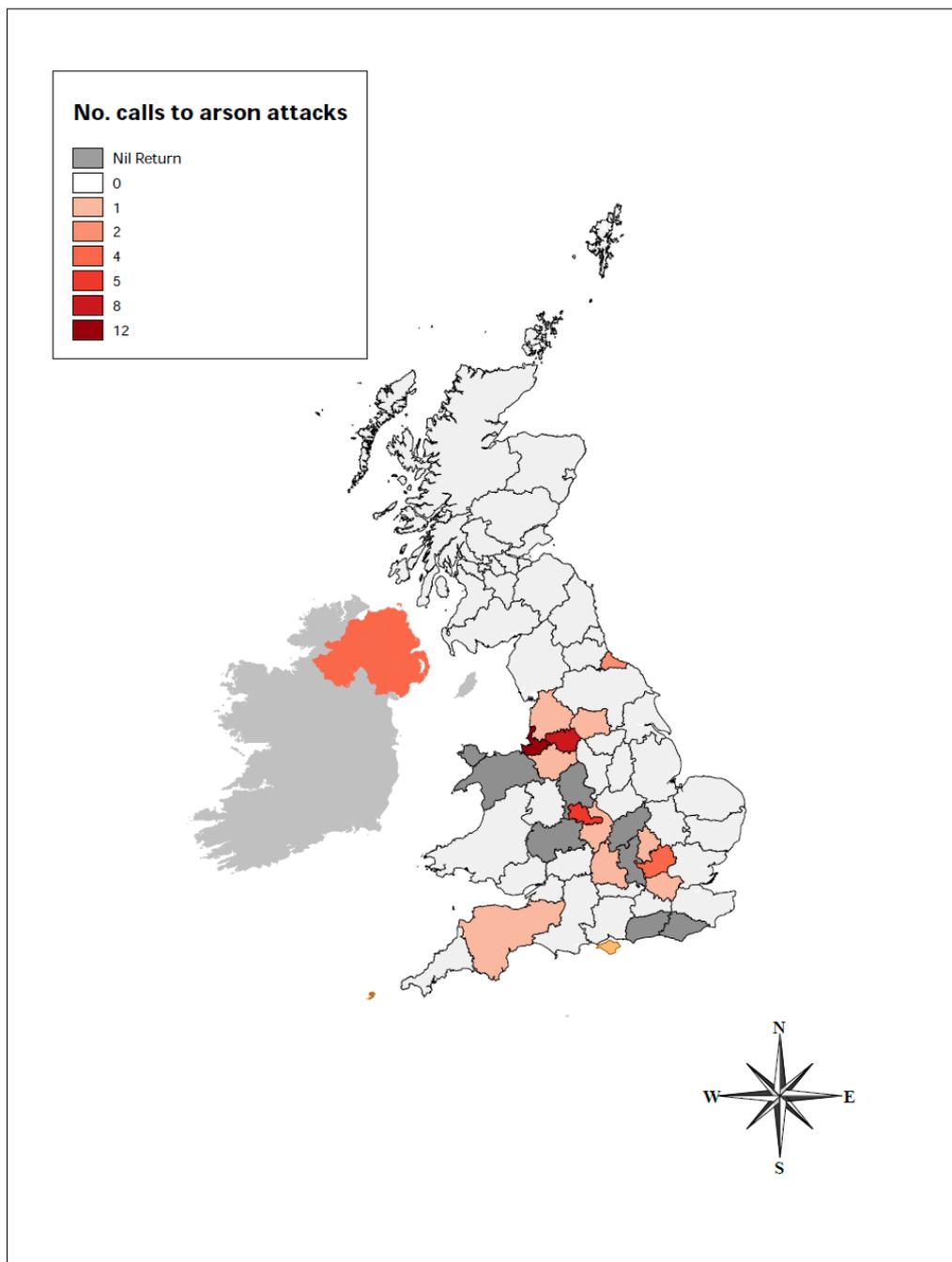
Birmingham Mail	Mobile phone masts torched	https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/no-link-between-5g-coronavirus-18060825
Forbes	Mobile phone masts conspiracies	https://www.forbes.com/sites/carlypage/2020/04/05/uk-phone-masts-are-being-set-on-fire-over-dangerous-5g-coronavirus-conspiracies/#36c7ee4a1bfe
CNBC	UK cell towers set on fire	https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/06/coronavirus-uk-cell-towers-set-on-fire-amid-5g-conspiracy-theories.html
DNC Data Centre	UK carriers urge conspiracists to stop burning down masts	https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/uk-carriers-urge-5g-coronavirus-conspiracists-stop-burning-down-mobile-masts-attacking-engineers/
INews	Mobile masts set alight	https://inews.co.uk/news/coronavirus-5g-conspiracy-theory-phone-masts-set-on-fire-as-false-claims-spread-2529882
Euro News	Vandals sets masts alight after false theories	https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/06/coronavirus-vandals-set-fire-to-phone-masts-amid-nonsense-theories-about-5g-and-covid-19
Nottingham Post	Vodafone, EE and O2 issue statement	https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/uk-world-news/vodafone-ee-o2-three-uk-4030577
Android Police	YouTube bans mast conspiracy theories	https://www.androidpolice.com/2020/04/08/5g-masts-set-on-fire-in-the-uk-as-coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-spread/

APPENDIX B

Fire and Rescue Service	Fires
Avon	0
Bedfordshire	1
Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes	Nil Return
Cambridgeshire	0
Cheshire	1
Cleveland	2
Cornwall	0
Cumbria	0
Derbyshire	0
Devon & Somerset	1
Dorset & Wiltshire	0
County Durham and Darlington	0
East Sussex	Nil Return
Essex	0
Gloucestershire	Nil Return
Greater Manchester	8
Hampshire	0
Hereford & Worcester	Nil Return
Hertfordshire	4
Humberside	0
Isle of Scilly	Nil Return
Isle of White	Nil Return
Kent	0
Lancashire	1
Leicestershire	0
Lincolnshire	0
London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority	1
Merseyside	12
Norfolk	0
North Yorkshire	0
North Wales	0
Northern Ireland	4
Northamptonshire	Nil Return
Northumberland	0
Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham	0
Oxfordshire	1
Royal Berkshire	0
Shropshire	0
South Wales	0
South Yorkshire	0
Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire	0
Suffolk	0
Surrey	0
Tyne and Wear	0
West Sussex	Nil Return
Mid and West Wales	0
Warwickshire	1
West Yorkshire	1
West Midlands	5
Scotland	0
TOTAL	43

APPENDIX C

5G Mast Incident

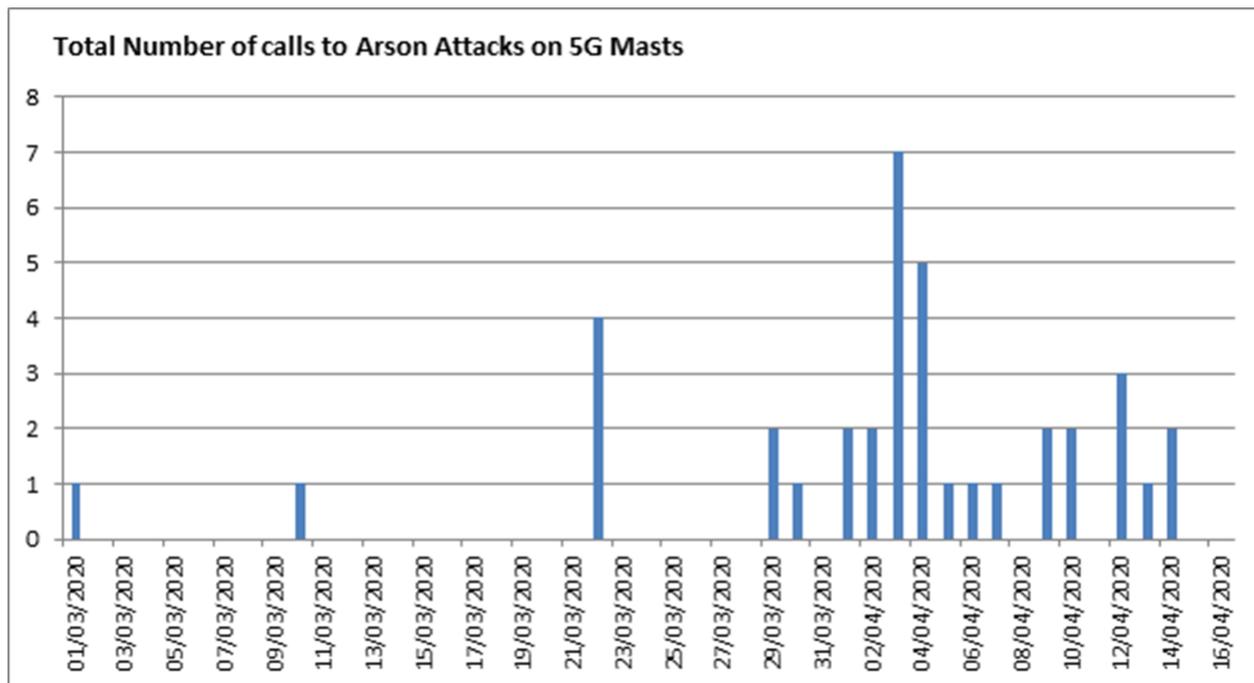


Sterling Court
Norton Road
Stevenage
Herts SG1 2JY
UK
Tel: +44 (0)1438 747996
Fax: +44 (0)1438 747997
E-mail: info@cadcorp.com



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APPENDIX D



Note; No date information on incidents attended in Northern Ireland or Warwickshire. Graph indicates 38 of the total 43 arson attacks attended by date.

England ✓	Wales ✓	Scotland ✓	Northern Ireland ✓
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