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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: John J. Goold

Date: September 22, 2006

Re: Michael Weatherwax

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Modesto, California – Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Michael Weatherwax, age 46, of Modesto was sentenced to 10 years in state prison for Arson and Attempted Arson after a jury convicted him on March 22, 2006. Deputy District Attorney Jeffrey W. Mangar prosecuted the case.

The charges arose out of events that occurred on November 29, 2005. An Arson Task Force consisting of members of the Modesto Police Department and Modesto Fire Department was organized after twenty one arson fires were set within a one mile radius of each other between July through November 2005.

Around 3 a.m. on November 29, 2005, Michael Weatherwax, who lived in the vicinity of the twenty one arson fires, was observed on his porch wearing women's clothes. He then went to the back of Long's Drug Store located at 1625 McHenry Avenue where thirteen pallets were stacked against the wall.

Using a cigarette lighter, the defendant attempted to light a bag which he shoved in between the pallets. Startled by a passing car, the defendant then went inside Long's Drug Store. About thirty minutes later, the defendant exited Long's and proceeded to the wooden pallets again. This time he successfully lit the pallets, and quickly walked away. Officers immediately arrested the defendant with the cigarette lighter still in his hand.

During this time, the defendant was still wearing women's clothing and a wig.

Arson Investigators have stated that since the defendant's arrest, there have been no more fires within a one mile radius of the defendant's house.

During sentencing, Jeff Mangar argued that "Mr. Weatherwax has repeatedly been given chances. In fact, he has a criminal record that spans over two-and-a-half decades in which he was convicted of nine separate felonies, including a felony conviction for child molestation. The defendant's pattern of increasing criminal conduct clearly shows he is a threat to the people of Modesto."

Mr. Weatherwax will be eligible for parole in 2014.