



THE UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

United States Attorney  
Eastern District of Washington

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 12, 2026

[EDWA.gov](http://EDWA.gov) | [@USAO\\_EDWA](https://twitter.com/USAO_EDWA)

Public Affairs Specialist

[USAWAE.Media@usdoj.gov](mailto:USAWAE.Media@usdoj.gov)

**Serial Arsonist Sentenced to 240 Months in Federal Prison for Setting  
Multiple Wildfires and Illegally Possessing a Firearm**

Yakima, Washington – First Assistant United States Attorney Pete Serrano announced that on May 11, 2026, Chief District Court Judge Stanley A. Bastian sentenced Zachary Tyler Vantuyl, age 34, of Selah, Washington to 240 months in federal prison for five counts of federal arson and felon in possession of a firearm. Vantuyl was also ordered to pay **\$1,010,343.44** in restitution for costs and damages assessed from the wildfires.

According to public documents and materials presented at sentencing, Agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (“ATF”) were investigating a series of wildfires set in 2023 and 2024. During these investigations and through the courage of eyewitness reports, agents began to see a pattern emerge involving what was confirmed to be a serial arsonist at work here in Eastern Washington.

Investigators were able to identify a 2022 Chevrolet Silverado pickup and the description of a male subject later confirmed to be Vantuyl at these fires in what was described by witnesses as disturbing behavior. Both the vehicle and Vantuyl were seen at wildfires set on September 3, 2024, and September 25, 2024. Specifically, on September 3, 2024, at approximately 1:00AM, a witness described to federal fire investigators having heard a vehicle and heard tires “peeling out” near the witness’s residence as the vehicle left the area. Within a few moments of the sound, the witness saw flames and embers in the area where the vehicle was stopped. At a follow up interview with ATF agents on September 25, 2024, the witness further described the vehicle as having a large 4x4 written on the driver’s corner and damage to the driver’s side of the vehicle. The witness described the driver as a white male with a “weathered” face, broad shouldered, with no facial hair and of average height. When the witness asked the man what he was doing, he claimed he was “DNR” (Department of Natural Resources). A firefighter with Kittitas Fire Rescue, who responded to the fire, contacted Vantuyl while the defendant was driving his truck near the fire. The firefighter went on to give an accurate description of the defendant’s vehicle. Both the witness and firefighter immediately identified Vantuyl from a photo array.

Similarly, at the scene of a September 25, 2024, wildfire, another firefighter witness advised federal investigators that he had seen a vehicle consistent the description of the defendant’s truck at the scene. The firefighter advised that, after the fire department arrived, Vantuyl’s truck left the scene at a high rate of speed, but returned about fifteen minutes later, hanging back and observing the fire. On September 26, 2024, a “Flock” camera in Selah captured a photograph of the defendant’s vehicle. The subsequent vehicle stop confirmed the details provided by witnesses and on surveillance cameras. Witnesses further took a photograph of the white Chevrolet Silverado that later came back registered to Vantuyl.



*Photograph taken on September 3, 2024, by eyewitness.*



*Photograph from September 26, 2025, in Selah.*

From the investigation, it was learned that Vantuyl had set additional fires on private property in White Swan, Washington. Specifically, on or about May 15, 2023, Vantuyl set fire to brush or grass on the privately-owned property of a now-former landlord located in White Swan, within the exterior boundaries of the Yakama Nation Indian Reservation. According to the victim, who both testified at an earlier hearing and provided a victim impact statement to the court, the victim and the victim’s spouse had hired Vantuyl to care for the owner’s several horses and other farm chores. Vantuyl lived on their farm for approximately two years and during that time, set multiple fires on the property (displayed below).



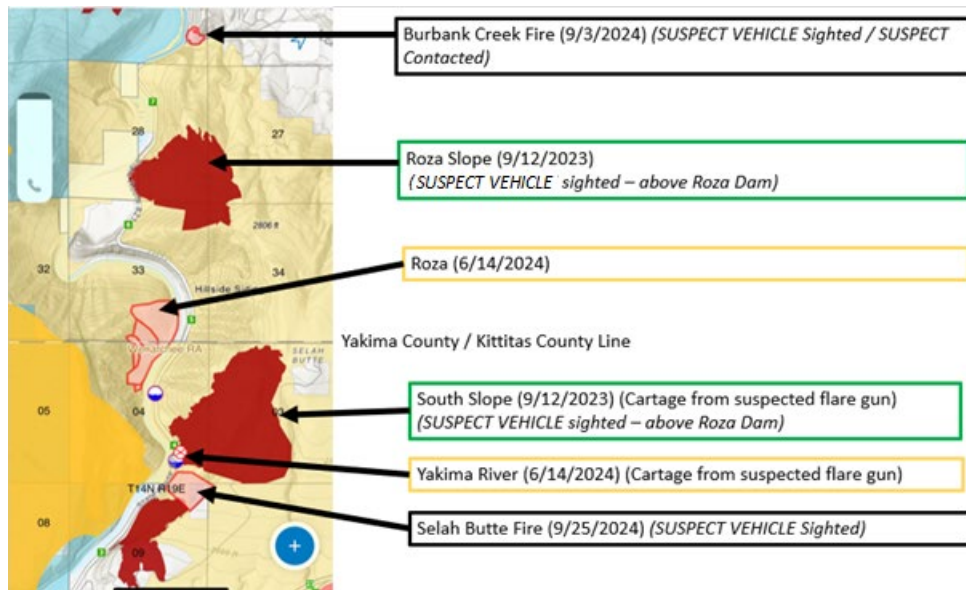
The victim wrote: “I came to know him very well and began to see patterns that led me to believe he was the arsonist that set over a dozen fires on and near our farm. Even more disturbing and dangerous is his insidious and vindictive nature that led him to kill five of our dogs and abuse and

shoot our horses. Mr. Vantuyl is incapable of feeling compassion for the suffering of animals and people. His motivation to cause harm and inability to feel remorse makes him a very dangerous man in any society.” The witness testified that the deaths of the animals happened after Vantuyl would make a remark, asking which ones were more valuable, or when he was annoyed at something.

On October 2, 2024, agents executed search warrants and conducted a traffic stop near Vantuyl’s residence in Selah, Washington of the white 2002 Chevrolet Silverado pickup truck registered and driven by Vantuyl. During the traffic stop of Vantuyl’s truck, law enforcement located a large gun case in the backseat, which contained a Savage Arms 93R17 bolt action, .17 H.M.R. caliber rifle. Vantuyl is a convicted felon and prohibited from possessing firearms. During the search of Vantuyl’s residence, they recovered evidence linking him to the fires.

On April 9, 2025, a federal grand jury returned an indictment charging Vantuyl with one count of “Timber Set Afire,” in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1855, and six counts of Arson of Federal Property, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 844(f). Vantuyl was also charged with being a Felon in Possession of a Firearm. Pursuant to a written plea agreement, counts 4 and 5 were dismissed at sentencing, though they were considered for restitution purposes.

The federal arson charges involved fires located both in Yakima County and Kittitas County and identified on the following map:



This was not Vantuyl’s first time setting fires. In 2012, Vantuyl was convicted of two counts of Arson in the First Degree and three counts of Arson in the Second Degree in Kittitas County Superior Court for five separate fires he started in April, May and June 2012 in Ellensburg, Washington. He was sentenced to a total period of confinement of 120 months, followed by 18 months of community custody, and ordered to pay \$193,791.52 in restitution. Vantuyl also has several other arson-related charges, including convictions for unlawful burning, false reporting of

fires to 911, as well as convictions for property damage, domestic violence, and violation of a protection order.

First Assistant United States Attorney Pete Serrano said, “The Eastern District of Washington is an ideal target for a serial arsonist like Mr. Vantuyl - in the summer when he set most of the fires, the landscape is dry with highly flammable brush and trees and high winds. Fire interdiction challenges are significant and forest fires are a known and potentially deadly risk in the region. And we know all too well about how fast fires can spread. Today’s sentencing sends a strong message that arson is not tolerated in the Eastern District of Washington, and my office will prosecute such cases to the fullest extent possible. This case is the result of excellent collaborative investigative efforts led by the ATF, federal and state authorities, and numerous firefighting and law enforcement agencies. I am grateful for the hard work and dedication it took from this team to bring this serial arsonist to justice.”

ATF Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Blais said of today’s sentence: “This sentence holds a dangerous offender accountable for a calculated pattern of destruction that put lives, homes, and entire communities at risk. Serial arson is not a victimless crime. It terrorizes neighborhoods and drains critical emergency resources. Our agency remains committed to aggressively investigating and prosecuting those who use fire as a weapon and to safeguarding the public from acts of deliberate violence.”

The case was investigated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (“ATF”) as well as fire investigators from the Bureau of Land Management or the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Many firefighting components and law enforcement agencies responded to the fires or otherwise contributed to the investigation. Those include:

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)  
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)  
Kalispel Tribe of Indians / Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)  
Idaho Department of Lands  
Selah Fire Department  
Selah Police Department  
Yakima Police Department  
Yakima Fire Department  
Yakima County Fire  
Yakama Nation Fire Management  
Kittitas County Fire and Rescue

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Letitia A. Sikes and Courtney R. Pratten. *Case Nos. 1:25-CR-2045-SAB; 1:24-CR-2072-SAB.*