



# Department of Justice

United States Attorney Julia C. Dudley  
Western District of Virginia

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## **FOUR INDICTED IN ARSON OF WEEKEND SOFA OUTLET**

### *Fire Caused Over \$800,000 Worth of Damage in Attempt to Collect Insurance Money*

United States Attorney Julia C. Dudley announced today the return of a 12-count indictment by a Federal Grand Jury sitting in the United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia in Roanoke charging four individuals with a variety of criminal actions related to an arson committed at the Weekend Sofa Outlet in Roanoke, Virginia on August 3, 2008.

Charged in the indictment were Jay Aneja, age 47, Michael Antwan Lee, age 43, Sidney Montre Terry, age 24 and Jason Ronald Verona, age 22, all of Roanoke, Virginia.

Each defendant was charged with one count of conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit arson. In addition, Aneja, Lee and Terry were each charged with one count of using fire to commit a felony (mail and wire fraud) and one count of causing malicious damage to a building by fire. Aneja was also charged with five counts of mail fraud, one count of wire fraud, one count of false representation of United States citizenship and one count of disposing of a firearm to a convicted felon.

“The United States Attorney’s Office has always taken allegations of arson very seriously. In addition to the loss of property and filing of false insurance claims that often accompanies arson, there is always a serious risk of injury or death,” United States Attorney Julia C. Dudley said today. “Fortunately in this case, none of the neighboring business owners, patrons, or the brave men and women from the fire department who courageously battled this blaze, were injured.”

According to the indictment, Weekend Sofa Outlet Inc., was a business selling furniture from a space rented at 5327-D Williamson Road, Roanoke, Virginia. Aneja served as the Vice-President and Virginia Registered Agent. Aneja signed official business related documents, such as business licenses, building leases and signature cards for the Weekend Sofa Outlet checking account.

In July 2008, Jay Aneja recruited Lee to set fire to the Weekend Sofa Outlet in order to collect insurance through the business's carrier, Auto Owners Insurance Company. Allegedly, Aneja offered Lee \$3,000 to set the fire.

The indictment alleges that, on August 2, 2008, Lee recruited Terry and Varona to help set the fire at the Weekend Sofa Outlet, telling them they too would be paid by Aneja for the arson.

Later that same day, Lee, Terry and Varona went to the Weekend Sofa Outlet. The three gained entrance to the business by using the key and security code provided to Lee by Aneja. The defendants loaded furniture for themselves, along with furniture they planned to sell on the street in Richmond, Virginia, into the box truck registered to Weekend Sofa Outlet. Aneja also provided keys to the box truck.

In addition to the furniture, the indictment claims that at the instruction of Aneja, Lee, Terry and Varona loaded specific business-related documents from the office into the box truck. While traveling on Interstate 64 on the way to Richmond, the box truck experienced engine problems and broke down. Lee called Aneja who picked up the three on the highway and drove them back to Roanoke, leaving the loaded box truck on the side of the road. Aneja later arranged to have the box truck towed back to Roanoke.

According to the indictment, when the group returned to Roanoke, Aneja dropped Lee and Terry off at a Hershberger Road restaurant before driving Varona to his home. Lee and Terry walked to a nearby convenience store, bought beer and cigarettes and then, once again using the key and security code provided by Aneja, entered the Weekend Sofa Outlet.

After spending several hours inside the business, Lee and Terry used an ignitable substance to set fire to several different locations inside the business. As they left, Lee activated the security system. The two walked back to the restaurant and took a cab to Lee's residence.

As a result of the fire, the owner of the building leased by Weekend Sofa Outlet and its insurer incurred losses of approximately \$407,000. Neighboring businesses and their insurers suffered losses in excess of \$300,000. Weekend Sofa Outlet, Inc., has filed claims of loss of over \$137,000.

Between September 2008 and November 2008, Aneja and SC filed an insurance claim on behalf of Weekend Sofa Outlet in an attempt to recover approximately \$137,000 in payment for damages to inventory as a result of the fire. The claims have not yet been paid.

In convicted on all counts, Aneja faces a maximum statutory penalty of up to 128 years imprisonment with 15 years mandatory imprisonment and a fine of up to \$2,000,000. Lee faces a maximum statutory penalty of 75 years imprisonment with 15 years mandatory imprisonment and a fine of up to \$1,000,000. Terry faces a maximum statutory penalty of 75 years imprisonment with 15 years mandatory imprisonment and a fine of up to \$1,000,000. Varona faces a maximum statutory penalty of 25 years imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$500,000.

The investigation of this case was handled by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Roanoke City Fire Department and the Roanoke City Police Department. Assistant United States Attorney Jennie L.M. Waering is prosecuting the case for the United States.

A Grand Jury indictment is only a charge and not evidence of guilt. The defendants are entitled to a fair trial with the burden on the government to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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