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Photos of abortion clinic arson suspect released, ATF offering \$5,000 reward

Ellen Gerst

Jun 7, 2022



Casper police have released video of the person they suspect set fire to an abortion clinic last month.

Casper Police Department

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Casper police released surveillance video Tuesday that shows a woman with a gas can entering an abortion clinic shortly before a fire ignited inside the building last month.

The woman, dressed in a black hoodie and wearing a white medical mask over her face, briskly walks to a doorway inside the facility, which was still under construction. She kneels and appears to open the gas can before the video ends. Police believe the May 25 fire was intentionally set. They disclosed that fact at the time, but on Tuesday released the first video and images of the suspect. The suspect appears to be a white woman of medium build and around 5 feet, 7 inches tall, according to Casper police. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is offering a \$5,000 reward to anyone with information that leads to

the suspect's arrest, police said. People with pertinent information can call the ATF at (307) 633-9400. Photos from surveillance footage show the suspect using a red gas can inside the building on Second Street. Police said they believe her to be between 5 feet, 6 inches and 5 feet, 8 inches tall. The suspect entered the building around 3:30 a.m. on May 25, police said, and was inside for around 15 minutes. The 30-second **video** released by police shows the suspect moving the gas tank from one side of the room to the other, kneeling, briefly pulling down her mask and opening the tank. The video was the first footage clinic founder Julie Burkhart had seen from the incident, she said Tuesday. She said while she was excited to hear police had released more information, she was slightly surprised to see the suspect does not appear to be a man. Burkhart said she's optimistic that police will be able to find and arrest the suspect, and that people in the community would recognize the person in the video. "The images are pretty good," she said. "I would really like to see justice." Burkhart turned over footage from as many as six surveillance cameras in and around the building following the fire.



Casper police

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Abortion clinic founder after fire: This world seems to be encased in violence

Ellen Gerst



Police first learned of the suspected arson shortly before 4 a.m. on May 25, when a caller reported seeing someone fleeing the building with a gas can and black bag. They found smoke upon arriving, and called the fire department. Fire officials said the blaze was relatively small, though there was “extensive” smoke damage reported inside. Fire officials reported finding an accelerant in several places inside the building. The clinic was set to open this month, but the fire has delayed that by “at least several weeks,” according to Burkhart. A firmer timeline should be available in the coming weeks, she said, as the team assesses its options.



Suspected arson to delay Casper clinic opening 'at least several weeks'

Ellen Gerst

Burkhart said her crew was putting finishing touches on the building, and some medical equipment had already been moved inside. She had left the building around 5:30 the night before, and a contractor was there later. The clinic had planned to start training staff the week following the fire. Since it was announced in April, the clinic has been the site of weekly protests by local anti-abortion activists. Around 70 people stand outside on even the slowest Thursday afternoons, praying and holding signs, according to organizer Bob Brechtel.



Casper police working with FBI to investigate possible arson at clinic

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Brechtel, a former state lawmaker, said after the fire that even though he opposes abortion, he does not support violence of any kind. He called the fire a senseless act. Other anti-abortion demonstrators told the Star-Tribune that they see abortions as a form of violence. Following the leaked draft opinion showing the Supreme Court is poised to overturn Roe v. Wade, around 200 people protested in favor of abortion rights in Casper on May 14. They marched past the clinic. The suspected arson has also drawn some national attention, including a **call** from actor Mark Ruffalo to donate to Wellspring Health Access, which operates the clinic. Burkhart said the clinic has seen an uptick in donations following the fire, and people offering to help in other ways.

The woman, dressed in a black hoodie and wearing a white medical mask over her face, briskly walks to a doorway inside the facility, which was still under construction. She kneels and appears to open the gas can before the video ends.

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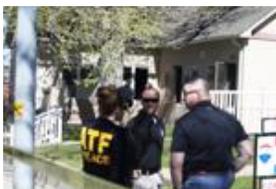
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