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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
Date: March 22, 2006
Re: Michael Weatherwax

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Modesto, California – The Stanislaus County District Attorney's Office announced today that Michael Weatherwax, age 46, of Modesto was convicted on March 22, 2006 of Arson and Attempted Arson after a jury trial. Deputy District Attorney Jeff Mangar prosecuted the case.

The case arose out of events which 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 and November of 2005.

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

Using a cigarette lighter, the defendant attempted to light a bag which he had 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 returned to the wooden pallets. This time he successfully lit the pallets on fire, and quickly walked away. Officers immediately arrested the defendant with the cigarette lighter still in his hand.

Weatherwax has one "strike" prior for lewd and lascivious acts on a child pursuant to Penal Code Section 288a that the judge found to be true, as well as two prior felony theft offenses,

for which he was sentenced to prison.

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.

A sentencing hearing is scheduled for August 14, 2006 in Department 7 before the Honorable Donald Shaver. The defendant's maximum exposure is 12 years in state prison.

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