

Arson in Boston area, Chicago threatens Jewish communities

One location, the Chabad Center for Jewish Life in Arlington, Massachusetts—also home to the rabbi’s family—was set on fire twice.

by [Aysha Khan](#) in the [June 19, 2019](#) issue



Luna and Avi Bukiet of Chabad Center for Jewish Life in Arlington, Massachusetts, addressing a news conference after multiple recent arson attempts on their home. Video screenshot.

A rash of fires that police say were intentionally set at synagogues and Jewish community centers in Chicago and the Boston area in mid-May left Jewish groups feeling vulnerable.

At the Chabad Center for Jewish Life in Arlington, Massachusetts, where the rabbi’s family lives, firefighters were called to put out a shingle fire May 11. They were called there again for another fire May 16.

Then, about an hour later that day, firefighters responded to a nearby fire at the Chabad Jewish Center in Needham, which is also a residence for the rabbi’s family.

Authorities said all three Boston-area fires were deliberately set and are being investigated as potential hate crimes.

Chanie Krinsky, who codirects the Needham Chabad with her husband, Rabbi Mendy Krinsky, wrote on social media: “Somebody out there wants to hurt us. Just because we exist. And that is frightening. Hate can’t be reasoned with. . . . Do a mitzvah today to bring more light into this world!”

No one was injured, and law enforcement officials said they have not determined whether the fires in the two Boston-area towns are connected. Nor have they said whether the incidents were linked to a fire that damaged the Diyanet Mosque in New Haven, Connecticut, the same week, which police say was also intentionally set.

“An attack on one synagogue is an attack on the entire Jewish community,” said Robert Trestan, the Anti-Defamation League’s New England regional director.

Days later, in Chicago, police found Molotov cocktails outside a synagogue and an adjacent Jewish community center over the weekend. Authorities say two attempts were made on May 19 to ignite the Anshe Sholom B’nai Israel Congregation and that windows of cars parked outside the synagogue and another nearby synagogue were smashed.

“The willful effort to attack a house of worship, to try to burn it down, is a chilling reminder, at a time of rising anti-Semitism in the United States, of the vulnerability of synagogues and other Jewish institutions,” said Laurence Bolotin, director of the American Jewish Committee’s Chicago branch.

“This incident is yet another disturbing reminder of the recent escalation in attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions,” David Goldenberg, Midwest regional director for the Anti-Defamation League, said in a statement.

Goldenberg pointed to the Boston fires and recent shootings at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and the Chabad of Poway near San Diego, which left 12 people dead in total. Earlier this month, video footage also surfaced showing two separate incidents in which Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn were being assaulted and harassed on the streets.

Violent attacks against US Jews doubled in 2018, according to the ADL’s annual audit of anti-Semitic incidents. There was a dramatic jump in assault on Jewish people

because of their religion, though harassment and vandalism were more common among the total of 1,879 incidents.

In Massachusetts, the ADL, the local chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the state fire marshal have offered a combined \$21,000 reward for tips leading to the arsonist's conviction.

Avi and Luna Bukiet of the Chabad Center in Arlington, Massachusetts, described the incident as shocking the entire community.

"We have committed our lives to spreading the universal message of light and love," Luna Bukiet said. "This will not deter us. If anything, we will double down to bring more goodness into the world and create a better world for all of our children."
—Religion News Service

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "Jewish institutions in Boston and Chicago are targets of arson attacks." The online version was edited May 31.