



COUNTY OF FRESNO

Lisa A. Smittcamp
District Attorney

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 6, 2016

JULIA HARPER ENTERS PLEA TO ARSON FOR IGNITING A HOUSE FIRE THAT INJURED FIREFIGHTER PETER DERN

Today, April 6, 2016, Julia Harper entered a plea to arson for starting a residential fire that seriously injured Fresno Firefighter Peter Dern on March 29, 2015.

This incident made national news when a video captured Firefighter Dern falling through the roof of a burning house that he was walking on. As a result, Firefighter Dern suffered life-threatening burns to over 60 percent of his body, and spent nearly six months in the hospital recovering from his injuries.

Ms. Harper entered a plea to Arson of an Inhabited Structure, and admitted the allegation that Firefighter Dern suffered Great Bodily Injury as a result of the fire.

As part of the plea agreement, Ms. Harper will be sentenced to a term of nine (9) years in State Prison. She will be sentenced in Department 34 of the Fresno County Superior Court on May 4, 2016.

Ms. Harper has been in custody at the Fresno County Jail since her arrest on April 22nd.

In reaching the agreed upon resolution, Deputy District Attorney Dennis Verzosa stated that “after a review of the entire investigation, and after careful consultation with Firefighter Peter Dern and his family, the Fresno Fire Department, and the Investigating Officers, we feel that this is an appropriate and fair resolution to this case. With this plea agreement, Firefighter Dern can now attempt to put this horrific incident behind him and focus completely on his recovery.”

The media may contact Administrative Legal Assistant Leslie Gillespie at (559) 600-4442 with any questions.

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