



# NEWS RELEASE

**RALPH HUDGENS**  
COMMISSIONER OF INSURANCE  
SAFETY FIRE COMMISSIONER  
INDUSTRIAL LOAN COMMISSIONER

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Seventh Floor, West Tower  
2 Martin Luther King Jr. Dr.  
Atlanta, Georgia, 30334  
[www.oci.ga.gov](http://www.oci.ga.gov)

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Contact: Glenn Allen  
404-463-0729  
[gallen@oci.ga.gov](mailto:gallen@oci.ga.gov)  
Twitter: @GA\_DOI

## **HUDGENS: STATE ARSON DOG DEAD AT AGE 15; HAD SUCCESSFUL CRIME-FIGHTING CAREER**

**Atlanta** – Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner Ralph Hudgens today announced that Cotton, the state’s sixth and longest serving arson dog, died Feb. 19, after a brief illness.

“We’ll always remember Cotton as a valuable employee in the fight against arson,” Hudgens said. “Without his special abilities, hundreds of suspicious fires in Georgia may have gone unsolved.”

Cotton was born Feb. 9, 2001, and began his training as an arson detection Labrador retriever in August 2003 at the Maine State Police Training Center in Alfred, Maine. He came to work for the Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner’s office in September 2003 as the sixth arson canine in the state to serve the law enforcement and fire service communities.

Between September 2003 and January 2014, Cotton and his handler, Investigator Bruce Gourley were involved in more than three thousand fire investigations. Cotton’s specialized training in sniffing out petrochemical products allowed him to determine if accelerants were used to start a fire. This ability led to the convictions of 250 arson suspects, which included six arrests for murders that involved arson.

Gourley and Cotton worked their last assignment in August 2013, on a business fire in Barrow County. That fire was determined to be intentionally set and the suspect pleaded guilty to arson and was sentenced to five years' probation and fined \$1,000.

Cotton’s training at the Maine State Police Training Center was underwritten by State Farm Insurance Companies. Since 1993, State Farm has paid for the national program, which trains dogs and handlers for fire departments and law enforcement agencies across the U.S.