

WILLFUL AND MALICIOUS DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY

G.L. c. 266, § 127

The defendant is charged with willful and malicious destruction of property (of a value over \$1,200).

In order to prove the defendant guilty of this offense, the Commonwealth must prove the following (three) (four) things beyond a reasonable doubt.

***First:* That the defendant injured or destroyed the (personal property) (dwelling house) (building) of another;**

***Second:* That the defendant did so willfully; (and)**

***Third:* That the defendant did so with malice;**

If value of property is alleged to be greater than \$1,200, add third element.

(and)

***Fourth:* That the amount of damage inflicted to the property was more than \$1,200.**

Effective April 13, 2018, St. 2018, c. 69, increased the felony threshold for this offense from \$250 to \$1,200. For offenses committed prior to April 13, 2018, insert "\$250" in place of "\$1,200."

An act is “willful” if it is done intentionally and by design, in contrast to an act which is done thoughtlessly or accidentally. A person acts willfully if he (she) intends the conduct and its harmful consequences.

An act is done with “malice” if it is done out of cruelty, hostility or revenge. To act with malice, one must act not only deliberately, but out of cruelty, hostility or revenge toward another.

if value of property is alleged to be greater than \$1,200. If you determine that the Commonwealth has proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant is guilty of willful and malicious destruction of property, you must go on to determine whether the Commonwealth also proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the reasonable cost of repair of the damaged property – or the reasonable cost of replacement if it cannot be repaired – was more than \$1,200.

Commonwealth v. Deberry, 441 Mass. 211, 215 n.7 (2004) (citing model instruction approvingly); *Commonwealth v. McGovern*, 397 Mass. 863, 868 (1986); *Commonwealth v. Hosman*, 257 Mass. 379, 384 (1926); *Commonwealth v. Chambers*, 90 Mass. App. Ct. 137, 144 n.7 (2016) (malice need not be directed toward owner of the property, just toward someone); *Commonwealth v. O’Neil*, 67 Mass. App. Ct. 284, 291 (2006) (offense requires proof of cruel, hostile or vengeful intent in addition to intentional doing of the unlawful act); *Commonwealth v. Peruzzi*, 15 Mass. App. Ct. 437, 440-44 (1983) (malice requires a showing that defendant was motivated by “cruelty, hostility or revenge”). Destruction incidental to some other venture or purpose is insufficient. *Commonwealth v.*

Morris M., 70 Mass. App. Ct. 688, 692-93 (2007) (it is not reasonably inferable that defendant purposefully destroyed the fence and turf motivated by hostility, cruelty, or vengeance as opposed to the resulting damage being occasioned by, or incidental to, his desire to escape his circumstances).

SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION

Where “willful and malicious” and “wanton destruction are both charged

in separate counts. **If you find that it has been proved beyond**

a reasonable doubt that the defendant did commit the property damage as alleged, you must then go on to determine whether it was done “willfully and maliciously” as alleged in Count ____, or “wantonly” as alleged in Count ____. As I have informed you, such conduct would be “willful and malicious” if the defendant acted out of cruelty, hostility or revenge toward another, and intended both the conduct and the harmful consequences.

Such conduct would instead be “wanton” if the defendant intended the conduct but not the harmful consequences, and was reckless or indifferent to the substantial damage that such conduct would probably cause. Since the required intent is different for the two counts, if you find the defendant guilty on one of those

counts, you are to return a not guilty verdict on the other count.

See Instruction 8.260, Wanton Destruction of Property.

NOTES:

1. **Distinction between “willful and malicious” and “wanton” destruction.** Wilful and malicious property destruction is a specific intent crime requiring proof that the defendant intended both the conduct and its harmful consequences, while wanton property destruction requires only a showing that the actor’s conduct was indifferent to, or in disregard of, the probable consequences. *Commonwealth v. Armand*, 411 Mass. 167, 170-171 (1991). The essence of the distinction “appears to lie in the fact that a wilful actor intends both his conduct and the resulting harm, whereas a wanton or reckless actor intends his conduct but not necessarily the resulting harm.” *Commonwealth v. Smith*, 17 Mass. App. Ct. 918, 920 (1983). As an example, if youths throw rocks from a bridge and one strikes a car passing below, the act is wanton if the rocks were thrown casually, without thought of striking any cars, but the act is wilful and malicious if the rocks were aimed at passing cars. *Commonwealth v. Cimino*, 34 Mass. App. Ct. 925, 927 (1993). “It is worth noting that destruction of property which accompanies even violent crime may not by that token alone qualify as wilful and malicious.” *Id.*

2. **“Wanton” destruction is not lesser included offense of “willful and malicious” destruction.** Wanton property destruction is not a lesser included offense of wilful and malicious property destruction (see Instruction 8.280), since wanton conduct requires proof that the likely effect of the defendant’s conduct was substantial harm, but wilful and malicious conduct does not. *Commonwealth v. Schuchardt*, 408 Mass. 347, 352 (1990).

3. **Value.** To prove the felony branch of this offense, the Commonwealth must additionally prove that “the value of the property so destroyed or injured” is over \$1,200. *Commonwealth v. Beale*, 434 Mass. 1024 (2001); *Commonwealth v. Lauzier*, 53 Mass. App. Ct. 626, 633 n.10 (2002). Where the damage is repairable, the value of the property is to be measured by the pecuniary loss (usually the reasonable repair or replacement cost), and not by the fair market value of the whole property or of the damaged portion. *Commonwealth v. Deberry*, 441 Mass. 211, 221-22 (2004), rev’g 57 Mass. App. Ct. 93 (2003); *Commonwealth v. Kirker*, 441 Mass. 226, 228-29 (2004). “Of course, in certain circumstances a seemingly minor type of damage may effectively destroy the value of an entire property, such as a tear in a valuable painting or a chip in an antique cup.” *Id.* at 222 n.20.