CITY OF COLONIAL HEIGHTS

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ARSON AWARENESS WEEK

MAY 6 – 12, 2012

PREVENT YOUTH FIRESETTING

The danger of fire is greater than ever. Fires burn quicker, hotter, and smoke is more toxic than in the past. In the hands of juveniles, fire can be deadly. Whether the child or adolescent was playing, experimenting, or purposely setting fires, firesetting is extremely costly. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reports that in 2008, children misusing fire started an estimated 53,500 fires reported to fire departments, causing an estimated 70 civilian deaths, 910 civilian injuries, and $279 million in direct property loss. Four common factors influence firesetting behavior among children and adolescents. These factors influence all types of firesetting and include easy access to ignition materials, lack of adequate supervision, and a failure to practice fire safety. A failure to practice fire safety.

The following are some commonly held myths about children and fire.

Myth: A child can control a small fire.

Fact: Most fires start small, but can become uncontrollable quickly.

Myth: It is normal for children to play with fire.

Fact: It is not normal for children to play with fire. Curiosity about fire is normal. Use of fire without an adult's knowledge, approval, or supervision is dangerous.

Myth: Firesetting is a phase children will outgrow.

Fact: Firesetting is not a phase. If a child is not taught fire safety, the firesetting can get out of control easily. It is a dangerous behavior.

Myth: If you burn a child's hand, he/she will stop setting fires.

Fact: Purposely burning a child's hand is child abuse and is against the law. The reason behind the firesetting must be discovered and addressed.

Myth: If you take a child to the burn unit to see burn survivors, he/she will stop misusing fire.

Fact: Going to the burn unit only instills fear, and does not teach a child anything about fire safety. More importantly, we need to be sensitive toward burn survivors who are trying to recover emotionally and physically from their burns.

It is important to understand myths concerning children and fire. Children need to be educated about fire and have their motives understood so that proper interventions can be used to stop the firesetting behavior.

For more information, please visit U S Fire Administration Web Site http://www.usfa.fema.gov/fireservice/subjects/arson/arson_awareness.shtm. If you know of a child playing with fire or a juvenile that has set a fire, please contact your local fire department. For more information, please contact Deputy Fire Marshal J. E. Boisseau.

Prevent Youth Firesetting

- Fires started by children playing accounted for an average of **56,300 fires with associated losses of 110 civilian deaths, 880 civilian injuries, and $286 million** in direct property damage per year between 2005 and 2009.
- **Younger children are more likely to set fires in homes,** while older children and teenagers are more likely to set fires outside.
- **Lighters were the heat source** in half (50 percent) of child-playing fires in homes.

- **Never leave matches or lighters within reach of children. Keep matches and lighters out of reach in high, locked cabinets.**
- **Praise your child for practicing responsible behavior and showing respect for fire. Set a good example; use matches, lighters, and fire carefully, as children will imitate positive behavior.**

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FEMA

U.S. Fire Administration
For information and resources on this subject, visit **www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/focus**

Coffee Break Training - Fire Prevention and Public Education

Factors Influencing Youth Firesetting Behavior

No. FM-2011-2 May 26, 2011

Learning Objective: The student will list four common factors influencing youth firesetting behavior.

There are four common factors that influence firesetting behavior among children and adolescents. These factors impact all types of firesetting and include

Children often don't understand the dangers associated with firesetting.

1. **Easy access to ignition materials.** Easy access to ignition materials often proves deadly for children who start fires. In many homes where a child has been involved in starting a fire, the child easily discovered the ignition source or already knew where it was located and how to obtain it.

2. **Lack of adequate supervision.** The lack of adequate supervision is a factor that can influence all ages of firesetting among children and adolescents. Parents are often shocked to discover their child has engaged in firesetting over a prolonged period of time.

3. **A failure to practice fire safety.** A failure to practice fire safety is a factor that often affects children and their parents in the following ways:

   a. Young children often lack understanding of the dangers associated with firesetting and safety rules about fire.

   b. Older children and adolescents may not have received school-based fire safety education about the dangers of the inappropriate use of fire, penalties for such behavior, and direction on what to do if a fire occurs.

   c. Parents/Care providers may not be aware of the significance of youth firesetting, appropriate fire safety education, penalties, or what actions to take in the event a fire occurs. They may not be aware of local youth firesetting prevention and intervention programs.

4. **Easy access to information on the Internet.** Information regarding firesetting, designing explosives, and how to do tricks with fire is a problem that demands attention. Technology has made explicit media available to youths on many dangerous and often illegal activities. They are able to experiment with fire or incendiary materials and instantaneously post results for the world to see and oftentimes replicate.

Awareness of these factors can help you educate your community about what can be done to prevent firesetting by children and adolescents.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). *Youth Firesetter Prevention and Intervention*, February 2011.

Coffee Break Training - Fire Prevention and Public Education

Myths and Facts about Children and Fire

No. FM-2011-3 June 9, 2011

Learning Objective: The student shall be able to distinguish between myths and facts concerning children and fire.

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