

HOT • ISSUES

What are we really talking about?



by David K. Wilcox, Ed.D.

Ed. note: This edition of *Hot Issues* is dedicated to coverage of the international presenters at the recent National Association of State Fire Marshals conference on juvenile firesetting. David Wilcox and Judy Okulitch, Program Manager, Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program, Office of State Fire Marshal were attendees.

*What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.*
William Shakespeare
Romeo and Juliet, Act II, Scene 2

If thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil!
William Shakespeare
Othello, Act II, Scene 3

Let's face it. There are lots of terms out there to describe juvenile firesetting. What are we really talking about when we use terms such as "child arson," "juvenile firesetting," "fire lighting," "fire play," "match play"? These are all terms describing a behavior we know as the unsanctioned or unsupervised use of fire by children or adolescents. At the recent National Association of State Fire Marshals International Conference on Juvenile Firesetting Intervention Practices, as well as at the National Fire Protection Association Annual Educational Meeting in Atlanta, one could sit in the audience and hear all these different terms used to describe this particular behavior.

However, all these terms mean different things to different people and at times make it difficult to ensure that we are actually talking about the same thing. In the United States, we typically refer to juvenile firesetting. Too often we tend to label children who engage in setting fires as "firesetters." Unfortunately,

this is a label that can too easily stigmatize instead of helping identify the behavior we need to address. In Australia, the term "fire lighting" is used to express this behavior in children and adolescents. "Fire play" in Sweden is a term used to capture a behavior that does not meet the standards of an arson offense. "Fire play" is a term used in parts of the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada to refer to children "playing" with fire and describes a behavior which is typically called "firesetting" when seen in the United States.

What is striking is that in the midst of calls for better research on the incidence of juvenile-set fires, better outcome research in intervention services, and greater precision in identifying risk factors associated with this behavior, we cannot yet agree on a common definition for the behavior we are trying to identify and address.

Before moving forward with a new wave of intervention efforts, data collection or research it may be useful for the field to try and bring some clarity to the terms we use to describe this behavior. Certainly from a public education perspective such clarity is critical. Using terms like "fire play" or "match play" sends an ambiguous message about the seriousness of this behavior. At worst, a parent searching for information on "fire play" on the Internet will uncover more links to the sadomasochistic use of fire as a form of sexual pleasure than helpful resources for their child.

In almost any training or presentation on juvenile firesetting behavior, the question inevitably arises, "What about a child playing with matches?" Is the unsupervised striking of a match really a behavior we consider as play? Such behavior, even with the most innocent of intentions, can result in death, injury, or the loss of property. Why do we continue to use

What are we really talking about?

Continued from page 1

terms such as “match play” or “fire play”? I think if any of us saw our own children striking matches or “playing” with fire we would react quite differently than if we saw them putting together a puzzle or making a spaceship out of Lego blocks.

Time and again, in the education of children and adolescents about fire, we convey the message that matches and lighters are tools. Creating and controlling fire is one of the most basic, yet critical, evolutionary developments that distinguishes homo sapiens from any other member of the hominid or ape family. Striking matches, flicking lighters, playing with candles, may all be exploratory behaviors driven by curiosity, but such behavior is not what any culture, even cultures which still exist in agrarian or hunter-gatherer groups, would consider as play.

Our own lack of specificity in defining this behavior, which we all recognize as dangerous and concerning, simply hinders our ability to deal directly with the children, families and communities we are all trying to serve. It is time for this field to come to some agreement about what to call this behavior. If we know what we are talking about, at the most basic level—the name for the behavior—we can then educate others and also be clear in our own minds what we are doing when we are offering intervention services.

David K. Wilcox, Ed.D., is the Clinical Coordinator, Massachusetts Coalition for Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Programs and Clinical Instructor in Psychology, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School.

Where in the world?



Hot Issues editor took a trip recently to...? If you know where in the world this old fire station is located, send an E-mail to Carol.BAUMANN@state.or.us or drop me a line via snail mail. Winner will be acknowledged in the next edition. And tell us about your juvenile firesetter intervention program while you're at it.

Hot Issues, page PB

Australia

Juvenile Fire Awareness & Intervention

Rob Taylor



Approximately 12% of all fires attended by the Melbourne Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFESB) are caused by children.

The aim of Juvenile Fire Awareness and Intervention (JFAIP) is to reduce the number of deaths, injuries and millions of dollars of property damage caused by fire play and fire lighting. JFAIP is a joint venture between MFESB, County Fire Authority (CFA), and the Royal Children's Hospital. Psychiatrists and psychologists from the Royal Children's Hospital and in private practice support the program. Referrals to the program are from parents, fire personnel, doctors, child welfare agencies, juvenile justice, and community policing, Children's Hospital Accident Prevention Centre and other family welfare sources. The Children's Court has made program participation mandatory for juvenile firesetters.

JFAIP provides services to children ages three to sixteen in Victoria. Since the program began in 1987, close to 2,200 children have participated—over 135 interventions yearly. The recidivism rate is ten percent.

The practitioners are professional firefighters who have been trained in juvenile firesetter intervention. They complete a three day training which covers fire behavior and incendiary devices, juvenile fire lighting behavior, interviewing skills, home fire safety, and the other agency partners. They also complete a twelve-month-long supervised probationary period.

Contact:

Mr. Rob Taylor, Commander, Community Education
Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board
619 Victoria Street
Abbotsford, Victoria
Australia 3067 *Airmail*
rtaylor@mfb.vic.gov.au

Australia



Children in Western Australia were responsible for over \$12 million dollars (aus) worth of structural fire damage in 2000 and they set over 3,100 deliberate fires.

The aim of the Juvenile and Family Fire Awareness (JAFFA) program is to minimize the loss of life and injury, property, and environmental damage caused by juveniles lighting fires. JAFFA helps juveniles understand the dangers of fireplay and educates them about fire behaviour and the potential long-term consequences of serious burns.

Staff includes a coordinator, intensively trained volunteer case managers and support from a registered psychologist. Firefighters are no longer formally involved with the program at any intervention level. Referrals come from parents, educators, police, firefighters, and juvenile justice workers. A *Child Behaviour Check List* is initially applied to the juvenile who is then referred to a single contracted service provider.

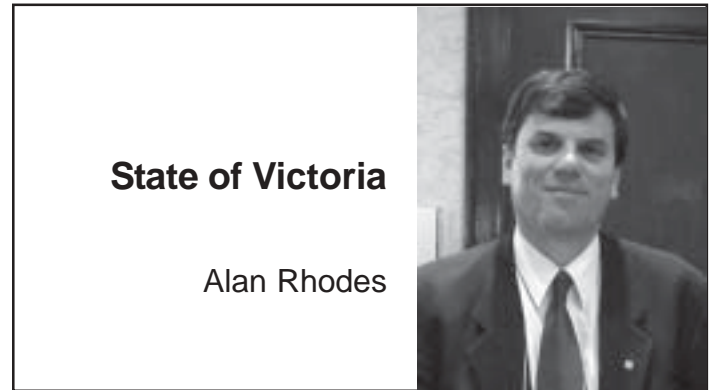
Hamilton said that a single intervention provider and lack of integration with other programs create real challenges for JAFFA. He asked, "...are we not better off looking at collective programs across government that address the real problems behind these kids? Should we not be providing decision-making models that will help them throughout their adult lives, and tackle head on the appalling social environments that these kids often come from?"

Hamilton outlined improvements to JAFFA which would feature equitable program access, several service providers, a more detailed initial assessment, integration with other at-risk youth programs and a better database on juvenile fire lighting statistics.

Contact:

*Barry Hamilton, Executive Director, Community Safety
Merveen Cross, Senior Community Safety Officer, Community Safety
Fire & Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia
PO Box P1174
Perth, Western Australia 6844 [Airmail](mailto:airmail)
bhamilton@fesa.wa.gov.au or mccross@fesa.wa.gov.au*

Australia



There were 10,970 fires statewide in 2001-2002 and 634 fires attributed to children. It is typical for two to five percent of fires across administrative regions to be juvenile-set, although the figure can approach ten to twelve percent in some regions. The data most likely underestimates the problem. There are approximately 250 referrals to the program per year.

The program's approach is non-punitive fire safety education and is focused on the individual rather than household members and context. The target group is juveniles three to sixteen years old. Over time, the client group has evolved to include a wide range of youths—such as those with intellectual disability, older youths, repeat offenders, and reluctant participants.

The assessment is done in an initial interview by a trained career firefighter and the intervention is delivered one-on-one in the home using reward incentives. Referrals to the program are made by parents, police, courts, schools, and other agencies.

Contact:

*Alan Rhodes, Manager Community Development
CFA (County Fire Authority)
8 Lakeside Drive
Burwood East, Vic.
PO Box 701
Mt. Waverley, Victoria 3149
Australia [Airmail](mailto:airmail)
a.rhodes@cfa.vic.gov.au*

Canada

The Arson Prevention Program for Children

Dr. Sherri MacKay



TAPP-C (The Arson Prevention Program for Children) is a collaborative program that brings together fire service and mental health professionals to work with children and teens, and their families to eliminate dangerous fire-related behaviors. Fire service professionals provide home fire safety checks and fire safety education and mental health professionals conduct risk assessments and provide brief parent- and child-focused treatment within a mental health framework.

TAPP-C was developed as a joint venture of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, a psychiatric teaching hospital of the University of Toronto, the Office of the Fire Marshal of Ontario, and the Toronto Fire Services.

Combining mental health service with fire safety education is now the norm in the province of Ontario. Program co-trainers, a mental health professional and a fire educator, travel to interested communities, assess available community resources, and provide educational workshops and materials. Since relationships are key to maintaining the program, TAPP-C provides consultations, updates, and networking.

The program serves 12 million people within 420,000 square miles. There are 500 fire departments; seventy-five percent are volunteer. There are more than fifty TAPP-C sites in Ontario and some are affiliated with several communities and fire departments.

According to a recent survey, most professionals trained in TAPP-C do adopt the program and find it beneficial. The collaborative nature of the program was rated as especially helpful.

Contact:

Dr. Sherri MacKay
TAPP-C, Child Psychiatry Program
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Clarke Division
250 College Street
Toronto, Ont M5T 1R8
Canada [Airmail](mailto:sherri_mackay@camh.net)
sherri_mackay@camh.net

Hot Issues, page 4

New Zealand

Fire Awareness & Intervention Program

Ray Coleman



In 2001-2002 in Auckland, 205 juveniles with a propensity to play with or set fires were seen, and 289 in Christchurch. The program has a ninety-five percent success rate, with recidivism defined as fire play or firesetting within twelve months of an intervention; any act after twelve months becomes a new situation.

The Fire Awareness and Intervention Program (FAIP) originated in Auckland in 1992. It became a national model in 1996. A *National Best Practice Manual* and *National Administration Manual* have been produced to ensure consistency and integrity of program.

Trained firefighters deliver the program in the client's home; however, referrals are made to other agencies when appropriate. Referral partners are police and family court, schools, social welfare, parents and mental health. FAIP deals only with the fire problem—consultation with mental health, education, the Family and Judiciary is ongoing and several psychologists keep a “watching brief” on resources and training. All resources used have been approved by mental health partners. FAIP uses workbooks, photographs, videos such as *Countdown to Disaster* and a questionnaire.

A potential interventionist attends a Youth Liaison Officer Course which is one week, pass/fail. A three month pass/fail field assessment follows. Upon passing successfully, a YLO identification card is issued, and confidentiality form and code of ethics are signed. Regular supervision of practitioners by mental health professionals is mandatory. In July of 2003, FAIP will trial the Oregon Screening Tool.

Contact:

Mr. Ray Coleman, Community & Youth Liaison Officer
New Zealand Fire Service
Auckland Fire Region
PO Box 68 444
Newton, Auckland
New Zealand [Airmail](mailto:ray.coleman@fire.org.nz)
ray.coleman@fire.org.nz

Sweden

Swedish Rescue Services Agency

Linda Smedberg



Ten thousand fires are deliberately started in Sweden each year. Sixty percent of them are set by juveniles. During the period from 1990-2002, 100-150 fire fatalities occurred annually; five to ten of the fatalities each year were children.

Swedish Rescue Services Agency is a supervisory government authority for the fire and rescue services. The agency promotes practices that improve accident prevention and response with the vision of creating a "safety culture" in Swedish communities. This is achieved through education and educational materials, training courses and exercises, developing methods and equipment, implementation of safety rules and support of research.

Professor Yvonne Terjestam has been conducting research on Swedish school children and fire, ages six through fifteen, since 1993. Conclusions from these studies have been published in *Children and Fire*, by Terjestam and Ryden (see article next column). *Children and Fire* is available in PDF format, either Swedish or English, on the Web site of Swedish Rescue Services Agency, www.srv.se.

Major projects with the European Commission, Action Program for Civil Protection, workshops, comparative research, European Union cooperation

Contact:

Ms. Linda Smedberg

Project Manager

Swedish Rescue Services Agency

SE-651 80

Karlstad, Sweden *Airmail*

linda.smedberg@srv.se

Sweden

University of Lund

Yvonne Terjestam Ph.D.



Children and Fire, by Terjestam and Ryden, presents results from studies of Swedish children and fire which Professor Terjestam has conducted since 1993. The contents include: Children play with fire, Guiding children, Should children be taught how to handle fire? Handling fire and the importance of self-image, Preventive measures, Action, relations and reflection, Do action programmes have an effect?

Among the study conclusions are: most children play with fire at some time, youths ages twelve to fourteen play with fire the most, and youngsters chiefly play with fire because they are curious or bored.

When asked what would prevent them from playing with fire, the Swedish children cited: risk of injury or damage, it is forbidden, risk of being found out, fear of punishment, and having something else to do.

Children and Fire concludes that "Learning by means of their own physical activity is particularly suitable for these children, but actually applies to all. Children learn best by being active themselves and under the guidance of someone they accept as a role model" (*Children and Fire*, Terjestam and Ryden, p. 24)

Further, "...our studies have shown that parents do not give children knowledge about fire and how to handle it. One reason for this seems to be that they are completely unaware of how children handle fire, how common it is for children to play with fire and how daringly many children handle fire." (*Children and Fire*, Terjestam and Ryden, p. 28)

Ms. Yvonne Terjestam, Ph.D.

CEMBA

Soflav 5d

22241 Lund, Sweden *Airmail*

yvonne.terjestam@psychology.lu.se

Scotland

One to One Firesetting Intervention Programme

Bob Bertram



Seventy percent of all Scottish fire services responses are attributed to deliberate fires, a large number of these carried out by young people of all ages.

One to One Firesetting Intervention Programme was set up in 1991 to address the growing number of youths involved in firesetting behavior and to help young people and their families understand the dangers and consequences of fire.

Education is delivered by Community Fire Safety Officers in the Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade who have received specialist training in intervention. The brigade is clear that it does not deliver counseling. Referrals come from various sources including parents, teachers, police, social workers, reporters to children's panels and firefighters at the scene of a fire.

One to One is committed to contacting the parents/guardians within two working days of the referral. No juvenile is approached without permission from the responsible adult. Education normally occurs over three visits. It encompasses an interview checklist, fire and fire knowledge questionnaires, written or verbal contracts, an onward referral if appropriate, agreed-upon follow-up and emergency contact.

Good practice guidelines include: the evaluation is an interview, not an interrogation; involvement in other issues or family problems is avoided; parent/guardian permission is essential; all are advised of the process; shock tactics are never used; responsibility is taken for referring on; confidentiality is respected, and only authorized, trained personnel deliver the program.

Challenges include developing a more accurate database and encouraging parents and others to make that first contact.

Contact:

Mr. Bob Bertram, Divisional Officer, Community Safety Group
Lothian & Borders Fire Brigade
Lauriston Place
Edinburgh EH3 9DE
Scotland *Airmail*
robert.bertram@lbfire.org.uk

Hot Issues, page 6

United Kingdom

Greater Manchester Fire Service

John Judd



In 2001-2002, Greater Manchester Fire Service experienced more than 29,041 fires. Seventy-seven percent of the fires, while not specifically identified as juvenile-set, were not accidental.

Greater Manchester Fire Service uses three programs to intervene in firesetting behavior: 1) FACE, established in 1997, serves children ages three to eleven who are playing with fire. Of 1,200 referrals to the program, only ten have re-offended. A structured fire education program is delivered in partnership with the parent/guardian. A program packet is left with the family to complete during an initial home visit. Contact is maintained, usually by phone, to monitor progress and discuss any problems; 2) FACE Plus, established in 2001, serves young offenders (some as young as ten) who are guilty of fire-related offenses. Participants are required to undergo a course of Supervised Fire Safety Education following a referral by the police (as a "final warning" with voluntary attendance) or courts (as an "action plan" with compulsory attendance); 3) Young Offenders, established in 1995, is an alternative to custody for offenders convicted of a fire-related offense. Referrals come from the court and attendance is compulsory. Nonattendance results in the offender being referred back to court for resentencing. Offenders must accept guilt and attend a thirteen week course.

Future challenges for the program include development of a program of fire safety education for young offenders involved in fire-related incidents who may be convicted and jailed for other, more serious crimes, and a program for socially excluded children.

Contact:

Chief John Judd, Ass't. County Fire Officer
Greater Manchester County Fire Service
Fire Service Headquarters
146 Bolton Road
Swinton, Manchester M27 8US
England *Airmail*
JP.judd@manchester.fire-uk.org

United Kingdom

Cleveland Fire Brigade

Chief John Burke



550,000 people live in the area served by Cleveland Fire Brigade. Recent research showed that many of the arson fires in their area are started by juveniles as an act of vandalism and that many of these fires occur in the disadvantaged areas of the community. In 2000, there were 6,000 fires believed to have been started by children under the age of ten.

To address this issue, the Cleveland Fire Brigade's program for juvenile firesetters focuses on prevention through education and direct action. The educational theme emphasizes continued fire safety education at the elementary school level and increased training for fire investigators.

Direct action involves initiatives to remove convenient targets of juvenile arson and by making access to favored juvenile arson targets more difficult. Some of the ways they are doing this are: expeditious removal of abandoned vehicles, neighborhood cleanups, improved and safer locations for garbage and rubbish containers, and gates at the end of alleys. These activities are being done in collaboration with other agencies in the community.

Many of the partnerships have been established with a focus in specific parts of the brigade's area. The challenge now is to expand successful initiatives through new partnerships to cover the whole brigade area.

Contact:
Chief John Burke, Director Service Support
Cleveland Fire Brigade
Brigade Headquarters
Endeavour House
Stockton Road, Hartlepool TS25 5TB
England Airmail
jburke@clevelandfire.gov.uk

United Kingdom

Juvenile Firesetters Intervention Programme

Deborah Brown
& Kevin Hepple



Juvenile Firesetters Intervention Programme begins with fire safety education in the schools. The lessons focus on fire education, fire safety and fire competence as a means to channel children's natural interest and curiosity about fire in a positive direction. Educational efforts are currently targeted at children in grades one, six and eight.

Age-appropriate programs exist for children involved in fire lighting activities. These include visits to the home by trained interventionists who provide education for the child and family. Education is also offered for young persons who have been referred by the justice system. The education for young offenders is packaged in a one week intensive course and the young people are referred by youth offending teams.

Young Firefighters Association is a program delivered by trained volunteers for at-risk youths ages thirteen to seventeen. This is a four year program which is associated with the fire service. Its objectives are to train the youths in personal development, and the development of self discipline, social consciousness, community awareness, leadership qualities and teamwork skills.

Contact:
Ms. Deborah Brown
Community Fire Safety Officer
Tyne & Wear Fire Brigade
Pilgrim Street
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE99 1HR
England Airmail
deborah.brown@twfire.org

Kevin Hepple
Divisional Officer
Tyne & Wear Fire Brigade
Pilgrim Street
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE99 1HR
England Airmail
kevin.hepple@twfire.org



Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal
Department of State Police
Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program
4760 Portland Road NE
Salem, OR 97305-1760

Resources

Fire Setting and Youth

The Office of the Fire Commissioner in Manitoba, Canada, recently released this new forty-page, full-color resource for intervening with juvenile firesetters with learning issues.

Fire Setting and Youth is designed specifically as a resource for parents, educators and professionals to discuss firesetting with youths with learning disabilities, cognitive impairments and other learning issues. The book talks about the attraction and implications of fire in child-friendly language. Color photographs illustrate concepts on each page. Also included are notes to adults, safety planning and a complete glossary of terms for children.

Authors are Paula Cook, B.Ed, M.Ed, who is a special education teacher in the Winnipeg school district, and Marc Proulx, who is a qualified Fire and Life Safety Educator for Winnipeg.

The cost of the book is \$15 (Canadian) plus shipping and handling. For further information, call (204) 726-6855 or E-mail emerserv@gov.mb.ca.

Last chance to participate in a national survey about juvenile firesetting!

David J. Kolko, Ph.D., is conducting a survey of firesetter intervention programs to collect nationwide data on who has a program, where the programs are, and the kind of services that are provided. If you have not already participated (or, if you have participated and your program has changed significantly) and you have access to the internet, you may complete the survey on Kolko's Web site, www.pitt.edu/~kolko. It's quick. It's easy. And your contribution will help advance the practice of juvenile firesetter intervention.

A special thank you to the
Metro Fire Marshals

for partial funding of the printing
of this issue of *Hot Issues*.

The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of Metro Fire Marshals.

Hot Issues is a quarterly newsletter of information and ideas for those concerned about juvenile firesetting. It is published by the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal. Please submit news, announcements, articles, suggestions or resources for review to *Hot Issues*. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this publication is available in alternate formats by calling 503.373.1540, ext. 240. Subscriptions are free of charge.

State Fire Marshal: Robert L. Garrison

Program Coordinator: Judith S. Okulitch

Editor: Carol Baumann