



HOT • ISSUES

Two case studies

by Rick Sanders, MA

A brief perusal of twenty-five assessments of firesetting juveniles revealed five cases in which children misused fire on public or unimproved lands. An anecdotal review of these two cases will highlight issues related to firesets in these settings.

Ned Ten-year-old Ned was referred to an outpatient hospital-based mental health clinic for a fire assessment after he was found lighting candles in his living room. He was diagnosed in early childhood with Moderate Mental Retardation and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. He had a long history of oppositional and violent behavior. Ned's mother described him as interested in fire but not preoccupied with it.

Four years previously, at age six and shortly after his stepfather's death, Ned began playing with fire. He attempted to smoke his mother's cigarettes and was found playing with matches in his room. A couple of years later Ned was found melting plastic toys on the stove. When asked about family uses of fire, his mother said she had quit smoking. She reported the family used a charcoal barbecue, which Ned avoided. Finally, Ned's mother disclosed that the family often went camping and she had to frequently tell him to stop adding sticks to the fire, but did not use these incidents as opportunities for safety instruction.

Shortly before this assessment, Ned joined friends in adult-supervised use of fireworks in an open field. He lit an incendiary fountain which started a living room-sized fire that was extinguished by the local fire department. After the fire, he reportedly felt remorseful and sad.

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This edition of *Hot Issues* explores the topic of juveniles and fire in wildland areas. Oregon experienced one of the worst wildfire seasons in its history this year and the loss and devastation caused by these fires is still fresh in our minds. We asked Rod Nichols of the Oregon Department of Forestry to describe the 2002 wildfire season in Oregon.

Nichols reported that the story of the 2002 wildland fire season in Oregon centers on the dry lightning storms of July 12 and 13. These thunderstorms, accompanied by little or no rain, ignited hundreds of fires, including the

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Oregon Dept. of Forestry

Number of fires and total acres burned on the 15.8 million acres of private, state and BLM lands protected by ODF, 1998 through 2001.

total fires: 4,362
total acres burned: 76,574
juveniles involved: 222
acres by juveniles: 409

United States Forest Service

Number of fires on Oregon National Forest protected by the USFS, 1998 to 2001.

total fires: 4,785
total acres burned: 152,779
juveniles involved: 25
acres by juveniles: 332.8

Bureau of Indian Affairs

Number of fires on lands protected by the BIA in Oregon, 1998 through 2001.

total fires: 804
total acres burned: 37,650
juveniles-set fires: 110
acres by juveniles: 1,067

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Ned denied having any sense of preoccupation, arousal, or relief with fire. He also denied that it had any symbolic or ritual significance to him that he was aware of. According to Ned, he had recently played with candles because he was bored and upset over conflicts with his mother. His response to questioning indicated that his firesetting represented inappropriate attempts at coping. It is interesting to note that Ned's public fire occurred in spite of being supervised while using fireworks and was one of a list of missed opportunities for safety education.

Tim Tim was a thirteen year-old who received a firesetting assessment while in a juvenile detention facility. He had a long history of problem behaviors, including threatening others with a knife, shoplifting (candy and fireworks), vandalism and sexual offending.

Tim reported a wide variety of firesetting experiences. He described lighting liquids (gasoline and hand sanitizer), sprays and paper. He said he sometimes burned paper and melted plastic in his family's fireplace and added that his grandfather had let him light his cigarettes. He admitted that he sometimes lit paper in his house and carried it through the house and outside while it burned. At twelve or thirteen years old, Tim joined a friend in lighting campfires in a field near his home. According to Tim, the boys sometimes put out the fire by urinating on it. He added that he put gasoline on one of these fires and the resulting smoke triggered an alarm in a nearby house.

During a vacation in the woods when Tim was twelve or thirteen years old, his father put a beer bottle with some gas into a campfire to make an explosion. Tim said that he later used bottles and gasoline to make Molotov cocktails, which he and a friend burned in a school yard. He also admitted throwing burning road flares off a cliff in a wooded area so he and a friend could watch the flames—he claimed the flames did not spread.

Tim's firesets were part of a broad spectrum of apparently delinquent behaviors. He presented himself as free of thought or mood disorders and said that his firesetting had been entirely for his amusement. He also reported that fire had no emotional or symbolic significance for him. Of particular note in Tim's case is the modeling he received from his father.

Open lands, fields and forests, are easily accessible throughout Oregon and use of these lands is an important aspect of our culture. Fortunately, neither of these youngsters' firesets resulted in major burns. But their stories include missed opportunities for safety education. When these children went camping, their parents provided either ineffectual supervision or inappropriate modeling. Of the five cases I considered for inclusion in this article, none of the incidents of firesetting on open lands resulted in timely referral for assessment and intervention. Also, none of the families interviewed said they had timely access to information about age-appropriate supervision and fire safety.

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2002 wildfire season in Oregon, continued from page 1

half-million-acre Biscuit Fire in southwest Oregon. Burning in federal wilderness, that fire has become the most expensive in history. The current cost figure is \$151 million. You have to go back to 1865 to find a larger fire in Oregon, the 988,000-acre Silverton Fire. Fire-fighting agencies were nearly overwhelmed by the number of fire starts during the storms. In the Roseburg area alone, there were seventy-five lightning-ignited fires going at once.

Oregon Department of Forestry and other wildland fire-suppression agencies depended heavily on private contract hand crews to get through the severe season. At the peak of the season, contractors had fielded some 270 twenty-person crews for fire fighting in Oregon and Washington. Governor

Kitzhaber's declaration of a State of Emergency freed up hundreds of Oregon National Guard (ORNG) troops to fight fire, as well as ORNG helicopters. Oregon Dept. of Corrections inmates and staff provided invaluable help to the suppression effort. They sent trained fire crews and kitchen crews to the large project fires to bolster existing forces. And correctional facilities around the state made and delivered to the fires tens of thousands of sack lunches each day for firefighters heading for the line. Structural task forces mobilized by the Office of State Fire Marshal under the Oregon Conflagration Act provided crucial protection to homes and other structures threatened by wildland fires.

Teaching campfire safety to children

by D. C. Haas

Since the 1940s, Smokey Bear has been reminding us to be careful with campfires: “Remember, only YOU can prevent forest fires.”

Even after all the years that Smokey has marketed his prevention message, escaped campfires still cause a significant number of wildland fires. In some areas, campfires are the leading cause of wildland fires. (Debris burning and arson are two other leading causes.)

When safety precautions are observed, a campfire can add a positive note to the outdoor experience. When the necessary precautions are not taken and a campfire escapes to start a wildfire, the resulting injuries and loss of life and property can be devastating.

In the Thirty Mile fire of July 2001, four Washington Forest Service firefighters were killed when they were trapped in a campfire-caused wildfire. Investigation reports blamed several parties for the four fatalities, but, ultimately, the responsible party was the one who left their campfire burning.

Wildfires caused by escaped campfires cost taxpayers millions of dollars in suppression costs each year. Although state and federal agencies may recoup costs when a responsible party is identified, the person responsible often goes unidentified.

“It just wouldn’t be camping without a campfire.” This was brought home to me a few weeks ago when my family and I visited friends who were camping at the Oregon coast. Just about every campsite had a fire roaring; the fires took the chill off the cool evening air and were the focal point of each campsite.

Children are naturally fascinated by a campfire and, as a parent of two small children, I’m very concerned when a campfire is burning. We all understand that children need to learn about fire safety at home and school and most children are exposed to fire drills and know how to “stop, drop, and roll.” Likewise,



children need to be taught outdoor fire safety skills by the adults who take them camping. Here are some good safety tips for parents:

- Monitor horseplay when the fire is burning. Children should not be permitted to play with sticks in the coals or flames. Hot embers can cause eye injuries and burns.
- Never allow small children around the campfire unescorted; a trip or fall could cause burn injuries with lifelong consequences.
- Be aware of other heat sources when camping. Propane cook stoves and lanterns get very hot. One touch will cause severe burns.
- Always check for burning regulations before starting a campfire. Recent rain is not necessarily the end of fire season. Some areas may prohibit open fires at any time.
- Confine the campfire to the designated area provided at most campgrounds.
- Take the time to ensure the campfire is out. Mix and stir the coals with water. Leave the fire ring cool to the touch.

Camping should be fun, but it can only remain that way when safe fire practices are followed. Use the opportunity to teach campfire safety to your children and set a good example. A few precautions can prevent a lifetime of misery.

D. C. Haas is the President of the Keep Oregon Green Association. Keep Oregon Green is a nonprofit association dedicated to preventing human-caused wildfires.

Australian “black Christmas” fires, 2001

Dear Reader:

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Hot Issues Editor

Looking beyond the fire

by Detective Raymond W. Downey

Fire investigation and investigative responsibilities, from a fire investigator's perspective, do not change if a suspect is a juvenile rather than an adult. I have found some investigators handle juvenile cases much differently, mistakenly thinking that they may use relaxed standards with juveniles. Be assured there are no short cuts to on-scene examination, interviews, documentation, policy rules or the individual rights in juvenile cases.

This past year I assisted with a fire investigation that occurred several weeks after the fire event. No police agency was included in the initial investigation. The fire involved forest lands owned by a timber corporation. Responding fire suppression crews crossed an adjacent private landowner's land to gain access. After extinguishing the fire, they noticed at the fire scene: vehicle tire prints, fire extinguisher retardant with an empty fire extinguisher, safety pull pins and debris from marijuana growing. They also noticed prior burn sites with similar items on the private property they had crossed to access the fire.

Through a seemingly unrelated criminal investigation, a seventeen-year old was identified and arrested for the theft of gasoline from logging equipment near the fire scene. The youth lived in the residence adjacent to the fire scene and he had access to a vehicle with tire prints similar to those found at the scene. It was decided to take the investigation be-

yond the fire using narcotics, theft of the gasoline, and ownership of the fire extinguisher to connect the juvenile back to the fire.

Investigation concerns from the fire scene examination were: documentation, evidence seized, issues of consent, who to interview and when to interview them. Photographs and evidence seized from both the timber corporation and private owner's land by the initial fire investigator were available.

Experienced fire investigators know all too well that fire origin and cause and culpability are difficult to prove with these types of fires. Those who work closely with police arson detectives know that, in many fire cases, the detectives are looking beyond the fire. Often crimes unrelated to the fire can be the key in the prosecution of guilty parties setting fires, including juvenile firesetters. Starting from the onset of the investigation look beyond the fire to the civil and/or criminal ramifications that will almost always follow the investigation.

A juvenile-caused fire is not a lesser fire. The case described above is far from being solved and the guilty identified. Juveniles do not make the case any easier. Do not let down your investigation standards and practices, and involve your arson detective early.

Detective Raymond W. Downey is with Oregon State Police Arson and Explosive Section.

Impact of the 2001 Australian bush fires

Ed. note: The following list, written at the time of the 2001 bush fires, illustrates a few of the many consequences of a major fire.

- 21 districts in New South Wales were declared to be natural disaster areas.
- More than 1,000 bush fire victims reported to emergency relief centers in eleven locations.
- 15,000 firefighters on call.
- 160 houses destroyed.
- 11,000 houses saved.
- Over 10,000 houses were without power with repairs hampered by fire. Emergency services restored power to 13,000 homes along the South Coast. Another 12,000 homes in other areas experienced long delays in having power restored.
- Insurance damage estimated at \$20 million Australian.
- The worst pollution in seven years necessitated warnings to asthmatics to stay indoors. Pollution reduced visibility in the Sydney area to about four kilometres.
- Power failures affected the quality of water supplies in many communities. In Sydney, damage to power supplies made it impossible to pump water to reservoirs.

FireFree:

*being proactive on
wildland fires*



What began with two juveniles lighting fireworks ended as a devastating fire which destroyed half a million dollars worth of property.

On July 2 in 2001, two boys, ages ten and twelve, were lighting fireworks in their residential neighborhood in the heart of Bend, Oregon. When their supply of fireworks was exhausted, the boys moved to a fort behind one of their houses and continued playing—this time with lighters.

The fire they started quickly got out of control and the fire department was called. Two homes were lost and adjacent properties were threatened as roofs on other homes were ignited by flying embers.

Adjacent properties escaped destruction because of fire department efforts, but also because the property owners had created a defensible space around their homes.

“Defensible space” is a concept that typically is applied to structures in the wildland/urban interface, but recommendations for creating a defensible space can be applied anywhere. These include maintaining a minimum of a thirty-foot fire-resistive area around the house; reducing flammable vegetation by removing or replacing it with fire-resistive plant materials; pruning low-hanging tree limbs and cutting grass and weeds regularly; keeping the roof and yard clean of leaves and debris; keeping wood piles at least thirty feet from the house; treating or replacing vulnerable roofing materials such as wood shakes and installing an

approved spark arrestor on a fireplace or woodstove chimney.

Bend, Oregon, has been proactive in educating and motivating residents to take responsibility for their own fire safety through a public awareness program called *FireFree*. The program was started in 1998 by SAFECO Corporation, the Bend Fire Department, Deschutes County fire agencies, the City of Bend Development Services and The Deschutes National Forest.

FireFree achieves its goals through education and promotion of behavior changes. The success of the program is largely due to the media campaign that includes ads on local television and radio reminding community members that they live in a fire-prone area. The campaign includes mass media advertising, public relations efforts and educational materials, as well as cooperative programs with other local organizations. This awareness is what leads residents to become active participants in the program. A community-wide clean-up event occurs at the conclusion of each year’s program. Community members can bring in their yard waste and dispose of it for free at a landfill, rather than burning it.

What began as a pilot program in Bend has already spread to over 300 cities or jurisdictions in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

For more information about *FireFree*, including program materials on creating a defensible space and a PDF version brochure of fire-resistive plants in Oregon, visit the *FireFree* Web site: <http://www.firefree.org>.

For information about ordering *FireFree* materials, go to page 8 of this edition of *Hot Issues*.

Congratulations to Portland (Oregon) Fire and Rescue

Portland Fire and Rescue recently received a \$15,000 grant from the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters. This grant is awarded under FEMA’s Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. The grant will enable Portland Fire and Rescue to expand their juvenile firesetter intervention program by enlisting the support of community partners. They will refine and deliver a six-session psycho-educational, early intervention program to youths and their parents/caregivers based on fire safety education, personal responsibility, changes in behavior and inclusion of the entire family.

Portland Fire and Rescue is a member of the Multnomah County Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Network which also includes mental health professionals, a residential treatment provider, local hospital and juvenile court counselors and probation officers. The grant will support the coordination, delivery and evaluation of this program through the network.

Future editions of *Hot Issues* will report on the progress of the program.

Conferences

The Programs and Methods of Other Countries

International conference on juvenile firesetting intervention programs

January 24 - 25, 2003

Greenbelt Marriott Hotel
Greenbelt, Maryland

The National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM), in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), are sponsoring this two-day conference.

Presentations and discussions by intervention team members from England, Scotland, Sweden, New Zealand and Australia will be featured. All presentations will be in English.

The registration fee is \$180 for the two days. Completed registration forms and registration fees can be submitted directly from the NASFM Web site. Mail-in forms are available on the Web site for downloading. Conference registrations will not be accepted after December 20, 2002.

The Web site address is www.firemarshals.org/

13th Annual Juvenile Arson Conference

January 22 - 24, 2003

Midland, Michigan

Topics for the conference include: Michigan Safe Schools; Juvenile Law; NFPA 1035 Professional Standards and Related Issues; Great Lakes Burn Camp; Fire at the High School; Children with Burn Injuries; Forensic Interviewing of Children; A Proactive Approach - Addressing Juvenile Firesetting in the Classroom.

The featured speakers are Donald Weatherspoon, Debra Carley, Gerry DeMillo, Ron Mills; David Morse, Pamela Pucci, Debra Poole, and Kathleen Lange.

The conference fee is \$160 until January 1. After January 1 the fee is \$185. Contact: Jim LaBuhn 586-228-9486 for more information.

A special thank you
to the

Portland (Oregon) Fire and Rescue

for printing this issue of *Hot Issues*.
*The opinions expressed in this publication
do not necessarily represent those of
Portland Fire and Rescue.*

A special thank you
to the

Oregon Fire Marshals Association

for printing the Spring/Summer issue of *Hot Issues*.
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Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program
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Salem, OR 97305-1760

Resources

Wildland fire homeowner education materials available

Residents should know the danger of wildfire striking their home if they choose to live in heavily forested areas. SAFECO Insurance Company is offering consumer education pieces to organizations and fire departments to distribute to residents who live in urban interface areas. SAFECO Community Relations developed the materials for *FireFree* in conjunction with fire prevention professionals in Bend, Oregon.

The free materials are: 1) *FireFree* tri-fold brochure, item #AR5187, limit of 500; and 2) *FireFree* presentation video, item #AR-5221, limit of two. The brochure and video outline the ten steps homeowners can take to create defensible space around their home.

The materials are available by sending an e-mail to hocr@safeco.com. Reference which materials you would like to receive, where they should be shipped, and how you plan to use them in your community.

For complete information about starting a *FireFree* program in your area, visit the program Web site: <http://www.firefree.org/howtostart/htm/gs.htm>

Starter kits with an extensive collection of *FireFree* materials are being offered to communities in Oregon (not individuals) through Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). The agency received funding from a National Fire Plan grant to produce the materials.

The kits contain a program implementation manual, videos, CDs with outlines of public service announcements for radio and television, a billboard plan, sample brochures and stationery. Copies of the sample materials included in the kit may be ordered from ODF as needed.

Communities receiving the kits must agree to use the materials and to give periodic reports on their implementation of *FireFree* to ODF. The contact person for the kits is Rick Gibson, (503) 945-7440.

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.

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