

HOT • ISSUES



Lighters and kids...

The problem that doesn't go away.

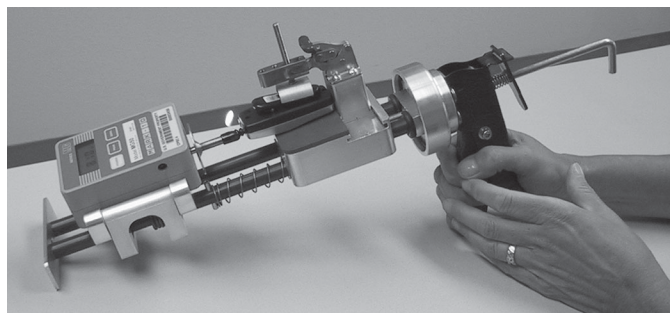
by Judith S. Okulitch

Something to think about:
What legitimate use does a child have for a lighter?

Oregon's juvenile firesetter intervention program has made reducing the accessibility of lighters and matches in homes and stores a priority for the last decade. In pursuit of this goal, the program:

- supported the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC) project to set new safety standards for disposable lighters; the rule was enacted in 1994;
- coordinated a statewide campaign to modify displays of disposable lighters at convenience and grocery stores;
- developed an educational program for parents which focuses on limiting the access to lighters and matches of young children;
- helped remove lighters that do not meet the safety standard from the market; and
- collaborated with the Oregon fire service in the CPSC research project to evaluate the effectiveness of the safety standards legislation.

THEN...the novelty lighter entered the marketplace. Lighters that look like a camera, cell phone, paint brush, hammer, saw, chain saw, electric plug, motorcycle, car, slot machine, lady bug and even a fire extinguisher became available in retail stores throughout Oregon. Citizens and fire personnel started calling the Office of State Fire Marshal's office with the question, "Are they legal"?



In researching the question, the program referred back to the federal standard. The Safety Standard for Cigarette Lighters (16C.F.R. Part 1210) "covers both

Youth courts: holding juvenile firesetters accountable

September was national youth court month

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the National Youth Court Center designated last month, September, as National Youth Court Month.

In keeping with its theme of "Empowering Youth Through Education and Service," National Youth Court Month sought:

- to educate the public about the valuable contributions that youth court programs make to the nation's juvenile justice system, schools, communities, and youth.
- to promote youth courts as one of the fastest growing youth-driven and youth-led prevention and intervention programs in the nation. According to the National Youth Court Center's database, in 1994 there were only seventy-eight youth court programs in operation; as of September 2003, there were over 900 youth court programs in operation in forty-six states and the District of Columbia.
- to celebrate the positive influence that youth courts have on youths, respondents, and volunteers.
- to honor the accomplishments of thousands of youth court volunteers, respondents, and staff.

Oregon's youth courts

Oregon has forty-four youth courts. Two of them which take cases involving fire offenses are highlighted here.

by Ruth Killius,
coordinator of the
Yamhill County Peer
Court Program

Yamhill County, Oregon

A youth court was established in Yamhill County in October 1994 with the first hearing

before a peer jury in January 1995. It was initially limited to the McMinnville/Lafayette area of Yamhill County. By 2000, the program was expanded to include youth offenders throughout Yamhill County. Participation in the program requires the youth to admit the offense. Youths from eleven to eighteen are eligible for referral on a variety of charges, from violations to class C felonies.

A youth charged with reckless burning, a class A misdemeanor, may have his case referred to Peer Court by the Juvenile Department. In the past year, there have been nine youths referred for reckless

burning incidences. All these offenders have chosen to admit the offense and have their punishment determined by a jury of their peers. They have each appeared individually before a panel of jurors who have questioned them about the incident and determined appropriate sanctions to impose.

As a requirement of participation in Peer Court, a youth charged with a firesetting offense must obtain a firesetter assessment and complete the treatment recommended by the assessor. Youth jurors also assign these offenders to write letters of apology to victims, including fire departments and public works departments that have responded to the fires, to perform community service ranging from fifty-five hours to 135 hours, to complete educational packets about arson, vandalism and decision making, to write essays and to make fire-safety posters, to attend the Youth at Risk Diversion (Y.A.R.D.) Program at the Federal Correctional Institute in Sheridan, Oregon, and to pay restitution for damages and the cost of fighting the fire.

The program in Yamhill County has worked well. Youths readily accept responsibility for correction of criminal behavior by their peers. In addition, there is a trickle-down effect for jurors, their friends, and family because they are able to learn firsthand about the effects of setting fires.

Deschutes County, Oregon

by Mary Fleischmann,
Youth Diversion Services
Coordinator and member
of the Board of Directors
for the Oregon Youth
Court Association

Sometime in late 1996, I was approached by Jim Gustafson (La Pine Fire Department) regarding

juvenile firesetters. He was concerned about them, especially the younger ones, as they were often too young for Deschutes County Juvenile Community Justice to take into custody or to provide many services. He noted that if a fire wasn't classified as "arson," no consequence was pursued; the offending youth's action would not be classified as a crime, so there was no way to intervene. This was especially true for cases the Forest Service investigated. Often these cases would simply get lost or staff would get discouraged because they were unable to get parental cooperation.

La Pine decided to address this problem through its local juvenile firesetter coalition. Coalition members include the State Fire Marshal's Office, regional fire departments, law enforcement, juvenile community

Normative studies of children and fire: an international issue

justice and the Juvenile Department. The local U.S. Forest Service staff have agreed to notify me at the juvenile department if they create a firesetter report and I make contact with the family. Through an agreement with the La Pine Fire Department, I assist in completing firesetter screenings.

Firesetting youths are held accountable for their actions. Juveniles twelve years and older are referred to our county's youth court program to receive sanctions from their peers for their actions. The youth court process stresses personal accountability and also gives the youths an opportunity to serve on jury duty—participating as a positive, contributing member of the community.

All youths sent to the youth court program receive a mandated firesetter screening upon intake. Various sanctions are used with firesetting youths. These include community service, research about fire, interviews with individuals such as law enforcement or hospital employees, or a community impact report (CIR). The CIR involves determining who in the community was impacted by the firesetting. This may include the youth's parents, fire service personnel, a business owner or schools. Several interviewees are selected—the selection depends on the specifics of the firesetting incidents—and the youth interviews them and writes a report which details the emotional and financial cost of the fire incident on others in the community.

As a result of the initial screening, a youth may be assigned to receive firesetting education through the local fire department or can be recommended for counseling through the Deschutes County Mental Health Department, Juvenile Community Justice, or a youth diversion program.

If the youth is not appropriate for peer court, they are referred to the A.L.E.R.T. program. The acronym A.L.E.R.T. stands for "Accountability Leads to Empowered and Responsible Teens." The program is a collaborative effort between local fire departments and Deschutes County Juvenile Community Justice. The program has an intensive educational component covering subjects ranging from communication and thinking errors to problem solving, accountability and preventing relapse. The goal of the curriculum is to help these youths understand the dangers of firesetting, the effect their fire had on others, and to provide an avenue for additional accountability.

Much of the research on juvenile firesetters has studied troubled youths who were receiving intervention services for misusing fire, or incarcerated youths who, after interviewing, were found to have firesetting experiences. For the incarcerated youths, firesetting episodes often were not the reason for incarceration, but were part of a larger array of delinquent behaviors.

The research raises some interesting questions: Are all juveniles who misuse fire troubled or delinquent? Just how common is misuse of fire among juveniles in general? This question has intrigued researchers around the world. This article discusses research conducted in Sweden, Canada and the United States on the normative fire behavior of juveniles. The three North American studies surveyed students and each study borrowed questions from, and expanded on, the study that preceded it.

Dr. Yvonne Terjestam, Ph.D., University of Lund, began surveying 736 compulsory school children in 1995 about their experiences with fire. The students in Hs cited their motives for setting fires as "wanting to see something burn (38 percent), "because they were bored" (27 percent), "because they were angry or they wanted to destroy something" (10 percent).

The children's attitudes toward fire were varied. Over half think that fire is "fun" (60 percent), more than a third think it is "exciting" (36 percent), and only about a fourth think it is "terrible" or "frightening."

The first North American survey, *Fireplay Report* (1999) was done in Surrey, B.C., by Ken Jones of the City of Surrey Fire Service, the Surrey School District, and the University College of the Fraser Valley (Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice). The survey sampled 1,351 students from grades one through twelve.

Results of the survey indicated that fireplay among school-aged youths is a very common behavior and that fireplay experiences increase, for both males and females, as they grow older. Elementary youths involved in fireplay activities were predominantly male; in secondary schools males and females were equally represented. In grades eight through twelve, 75 percent of the students reported continuing with fireplay activities despite being taught about fire

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Washington County (Oregon) Fire Academy Program uses team work to help juvenile firesetters

by Dr. Linda Nishi-Strattner

Data from the Washington County Fire Academy Program:

a preliminary report

The Washington County Fire Academy Program is in its fourth year, and emerging data show some hopeful signs.

The Fire Academy is based upon a family involvement model. It is designed to pair parent training with the more traditional child educational classes. In each of

our sixteen Fire Academy courses since August of 2000, families have attended classes that included child, family and group activities, homework assignments, and parent classes.

The parent classes were designed to address the problems identified in firesetting literature on the characteristics of parents of juvenile firesetters: lack of supervision, low parental involvement in positive or rewarding activities, and reliance on punishment as a disciplinary technique.

The parent classes also provide the parents with information from the juvenile firesetter psychological literature which may help them understand their children, identify their children's treatment needs, and motivate them to participate in interventions with their children.

The child classes combined age-appropriate activities which taught fire safety lessons, displayed the consequences of firesetting behavior, and taught social skills such as resisting peer pressure. Juvenile firesetter interventionist Jim Washburn coordinated the overall program, screened the children, performed the outreach, and maintained the links between our program, Washington County Juvenile Department and other community programs. Jim also teaches the child classes, with the help of Deputy Fire Marshal Dave Foster from Hillsboro Fire and Rescue.

This article discusses the data collected from sixteen Fire Academy parent classes since December of 2000. These classes were offered free of charge on alternate months for the first two years through a generous grant from Washington County Juvenile Department. Funding has been cut back since June of 2003 so we will be able to offer only three classes this year.

Each class served an average of five families. This represents a total of 219 juvenile firesetters ranging in age from four to seventeen years. Parents completed a parent survey at the beginning of the Fire Academy,

and a follow-up survey was completed over the telephone in August of 2003. This follow-up survey was conducted a minimum of three months and a maximum of thirty-six months after the family's completion of the Fire Academy course. In the parent survey, parents were asked to indicate whether their children were first-time firesetters or repeat firesetters. We have compared the data about these children with an eye toward the similarities and differences between these two groups. All of the findings presented here are statistically significant at the .05 level of probability or better.

We are interested in knowing whether repeat firesetters are different from first-time firesetters; our study shows a number of factors that separate these two groups. A majority of the parents (59.8 percent) reported that their children had set fire or played with matches before. According to their parents' reports, repeat firesetters have more special education needs, were also more likely to have been in counseling, to have fewer friends, and to have more arguments with caregivers than onetime firesetters. Their firesetting was somewhat different also: repeat firesetters were more likely to have set fires outside of the home, more likely to destroy their own possessions, to be fascinated with fire, and to have misused or altered fireworks as part of their firesetting. Repeat firesetters were also less likely to go for help than were onetime firesetters. Interestingly, repeat firesetters had less of a history of physical or sexual abuse than did onetime firesetters.

A number of factors were common to both repeat firesetters and first-time firesetters. Across the board, firesetters were likely to have easy access to lighters or matches (58.5 percent of the parents who responded to our Parent Questionnaire indicated that this was true for their children). Our firesetters as a group were prone to stealing or shoplifting (33.3 percent of parents reported that this was true for their children), had a history of lying (62.1 percent of parents reported this), were likely to be physically aggressive (34.6 percent of parents reported this), and to have been suspended or expelled from school (39.5 percent of parents reported this).

Parents reported a number of social difficulties for their juvenile firesetter children. The number of

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parents who reported that their child was often picked on by others was 42.75 percent and 39.5 percent reported that their firesetter child had few friends. Over half (51.7 percent) of the parents reported that their juvenile firesetter children had friends who were a bad influence. It was not unusual for a juvenile firesetter and his/her family to find themselves sitting in a Fire Academy class near the child who had also been involved in the most recent firesetting incident.

Finally, there were a number of family factors that seemed to characterize families of juvenile firesetters overall: these parents reported that their children did not spend much time with a male caregiver, did not spend much time with a female caregiver, had others in the home who had set fires (24.4 percent of parents reported this). In addition, many (40 percent) of these parents reported that their families had moved frequently, and most parents reported that their children had witnessed parents arguing (75.9 percent reported this was true of their families).

Our follow-up data suggest that we have had some successes. Of the fifty-three juvenile department referrals into our program, only three families did not complete the classes. Jim Washburn's follow-up survey of the entire group suggests that only 6.2 percent of our children set another fire after completing the Fire Academy classes.

Another measure of recidivism was provided by our telephone survey of thirty-two parents in August of

2003, which identified two children who had set another fire after completing the Fire Academy classes (6.9 percent of parents responding indicated that this was true). It would be interesting to know if the recidivists were among the children who entered our Fire Academy classes as a "repeat firesetter," or whether two of our "first-timers" went on to repeat their firesetting activities after completing the Fire Academy classes. We are proud of the low number of recidivists, given that so many of our juvenile firesetters (59.8 percent) were repeat firesetters when they began our program!

Of the thirty-two parents who responded to our follow-up telephone survey, 12.5 percent indicated that their children had been suspended from school, expelled, or continued to have behavioral problems after completing the Fire Academy. Due to the relatively small sample size, one needs to be cautious about over-interpreting this follow-up survey data. We are hopeful that future research may show a clearer link between successes in programs such as the Fire Academy and successes in school.

Special thanks to the Washington County Juvenile Department which funds our Washington County Fire Academy through a special grant through the Oregon State Juvenile Crime Prevention Program. Thanks also to Kelly Machan, Pacific University psychology student, for her work with data coding and analysis for this study.

Dr. Linda Nishi-Strattner is a psychologist in private practice. She is a member of the Oregon Treatment Strategies Task Force.

IAAI to develop class for investigators of juvenile-set fires

The International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI) has received a FEMA grant to develop a train-the-trainer educational program for fire and arson investigators in the investigation of juvenile-set fires.

The program will cover the importance of investigating youth-set fires, legal authority to investigate fires, investigation techniques, data about youth-set fires in terms of ignition sources, materials and fire locations, appropriate documentation and restrictions when talking with juveniles, and interviewing techniques used with juveniles. Protocols for dealing with youths who commit fire offenses will be developed for fire departments working with law enforcement agencies and fire investigators.

The project management team represents a partnership between the International Arson Association Investigators and the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM). The Project Director is Cory W. Reeves representing the IAAI. Mr. Reeves is a profes-

sional fire investigator who has served with the Cahokia Volunteer Fire Department and the St. Clair County Sheriff's Department in Southern Illinois. In May of 2002, Mr. Reeves completed his second term as a member of the Board of Directors of IAAI. Mr. Reeves is currently a member of the Juvenile Firesetter Committee of the IAAI.

Mrs. Judith Okulitch, Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal, is the Primary Team Member. Mrs. Okulitch is the Program Coordinator for the OSFM Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program. She has been responsible for establishing a continuum of care for child firesetters and their families using community-based prevention, intervention and treatment programs.

The OSFM is a strategic partner with IAAI in the development of the project. Other partners on the project are fire service professionals, law enforcement officers, mental health providers and juvenile justice professionals.

safety; 50 percent continued despite being punished. Most of the students said they did it “just for the fun of it.”

In 2001 the Oregon office of State Fire Marshal conducted the *Fire Interest Survey* in partnership with thirteen school districts across Oregon and the Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior at the University of Oregon. In all, 5,416 students in grades three through eight responded to a questionnaire which was a modification of the questions used in the 1999 Surrey, B.C. study. Students were asked questions about fire-related knowledge, behavior and attitudes.

Fifty-three percent of the youths reported never starting an unsupervised fire. Ninety-four percent reported receiving fire safety education in school and were able to answer the majority of fire knowledge questions correctly. Ninety percent believed that negative consequences can follow unsafe fire use. Middle school students were more likely to report an interest in fire, more likely to start fires, less likely to report being afraid of fire, and less likely to think that negative consequences can follow unsafe use of fire. Data from the Oregon study indicate that firesetting behavior is not normative, that about 6 percent of the students may require more intensive intervention, and that prevention efforts would best be targeted at students in elementary school (ages six through ten).

Oregon students gave four major reasons for involvement with fire: “just for fun” (23 percent), “to destroy something” (22 percent), “because they were bored” (19 percent) and “to see what would happen” (18 percent).

The most recent study, *A Survey of the Disposition, Affinity, Interest and Experience with Fire of Students in the City of Greater Sudbury* (2002, Ontario, Canada), was done by Andre Cotterall, B.A. Criminology, M.A. Applied Social Research. Cotterall surveyed 3,031 students from grades three through thirteen.

Several conclusions support the two prior studies: 1) “Most students set fire just for the fun of it, to destroy something, out of boredom, or to see what will happen...just for fun was the number one reported reason...males in general and those students in higher grades start more fires for each of the reasons listed”; 2) “Fire safety education was found to have a positive influence on a student’s ability to answer each of the fire knowledge and fire safety questions correctly...although fire knowledge is important, it does not stop a student from playing with fire;” 3) “Students do not have fixed motives for starting fires,

and whatever reason a student has reported for starting a fire, they are likely to report other reasons. This certainly points away from the utility of classifying children or youths and their motives for starting fires into discrete categories;” 4) “The analysis up to this point also indicates that as students move from grade five to grade six (an average age of ten and eleven years old) whether male or female, they will begin to show a sharp increase in the level of fire play experience and fire play behaviours.”

These studies, taken together, represent the normative fire behaviors of 10,534 youths. Fire safety education and punishment appear to be ineffective at stopping the behavior. The reasons juveniles give for fireplay or firesetting—just for fun, boredom, to destroy something, or to see what will happen—clearly should be factored into a proactive intervention program.

Andre Cotterall is currently working for the Sudbury and District Health Unit RRED Division (Resource Research Education and Development) as an Assistant Researcher. The organization works with communities to promote and protect health and to prevent disease.

He is writing an article for an academic journal with his supervisor, Dr. Wilkinson, based on some of the scales he constructed and he has an interest in writing an article combining his research with that of Yvonne Terjestam of the University of Lund in Sweden.

If you wish to contact Cotterall about his study, he can be reached at andrejames_cot@hotmail.com

The OSFM *Fire Interest Survey* can be accessed on the OSFM Web site, www.sfm.state.or.us

See page 8 for information about the work of Dr. Yvonne Terjestam.

A special thank you
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**International Association
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*The opinions expressed in this publication
do not necessarily represent
those of IAAI.*

Lighters and kids, continued from page 1

importers and manufacturers of cigarette lighters and requires that disposable and novelty lighters be child-resistant.”

The standard defines a novelty lighter as a lighter that has entertaining audio or visual effects or that would be appealing to children under the age of five years. Any lighter that depicts or resembles cartoon characters, toys, guns, watches, musical instruments, vehicles, toy animals, food or beverages, or that plays musical notes or has flashing lights is a novelty lighter. A novelty lighter may operate on any fuel, including butane or liquid fuel. These lighters are subject to the requirements for child-resistance regardless of the customs value or factory price.

The rule covers both novelty and disposable cigarette lighters and requires that:

- “At least 85 percent of the children who test a surrogate lighter must be unable to make it work.
- The mechanism that makes the lighter child-resistant must reset auto-matically each time someone tries to light it.
- The child-resistant mechanism must not impair the safe operation of the lighter when the lighter is used in a normal and convenient manner.
- The child-resistant mechanism must work properly for the reasonable expected life of the lighter and;
- Users must be unable to easily override or undo the child-resistant mechanism.”

A disposable lighter is one that is either not refillable with fuel or, uses a gas such as butane, isobutane, propane or other liquefied hydrocarbon under pressure, and is under \$2.

In August 2002, the CPSC contracted with the Office of State Fire Marshal to conduct inspections of retail stores and test cigarette (especially novelty) lighters to determine compliance with the standard. A screening tool was developed which measures the force placed on an ignition button. The lowest force specification currently on file with the Office of Compliance is eight pounds. Therefore the lighters that are being tested require at least eight pounds of force to operate.

Program staff have conducted over twenty inspections in the past year. While most of the novelty lighters are passing the eight pounds requirement, the inspections are yielding interesting educational results. Most retail store owners are unaware that they can request a Certificate of Compliance from the

lighter distributor ensuring that the lighter has been properly tested and met the child-resistant standard. Also, educating the store owner about the attractiveness these toy-like lighters pose to children often results in the store owner removing the product from their shelves.

Even with manufacturers’ strict compliance to the eight pounds requirement, children under five can still start a fire with a novelty lighter. On June 24, 2003, a four and a half year old playing with a lighter that looks like a horse started his teddy bear on fire. The resulting fire caused over \$60,000 worth of damage to his family home and injured his eighteen-year-old sister. (See photos of the house below.)

The problem of kids and lighters just doesn’t go away!

Judith Okulitch is the program coordinator of the Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program at the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal. She will be delivering a presentation on Oregon’s lighter testing program at the Children and Fire 10 conference, November 9 - 12, in Framingham, Massachusetts.





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Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program
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Resources

Web resources to check out!

To learn more about youth courts and to obtain an action kit, visit the National Youth Court Web site at <http://www.youthcourt.net>. This is an excellent and lively site, with plenty of help for a community considering establishing a youth court. There is a companion site, <http://www.ycyouth.net>, specifically for youths involved in a youth court. Both sites are well worth a visit.

For more information about novelty lighters, visit the Office of State Fire Marshal Web site, <http://www.sfm.state.or.us>. There is a section within the Juvenile Firesetter Intervention portion of the site which contains more information and photos of novelty lighters. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), also features lighters, especially lighter recalls, on its site: <http://www.cpsc.gov>

The Lighter Association Web site is the lighter industry's Web presence. The site address is www.lighterassociation.org

Children & Fire



This report, *Children & Fire*, is an extract from the Swedish book, *Att leka med elden - en bok om barn, eld och brand* (Terjestam & Ryden, 1999).

The book is based on many years of research by Yvonne Terjestam on how often children play with fire, why they do so and what we as adults can do to prevent this.

Children & Fire is available as a PDF on the Web at www.srv.se.

There are several other topics of interest from Terjestam's research on the site such as *Preventing children to play with fire: a program for children 10 to 14 years of age*, *Preventing Arson Among Children*, and *Safety summer camp for children*.

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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