

HOT *issues*

A publication of the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal Juvenile With Fire Intervention Program • Winter 2010

Multidisciplinary perspectives on age appropriate fire education for preschool students

The NFPA reports that nearly 19% of reported fires are set by children 4 years of age. Nearly two thirds (63%) of all fatal victims of fires by playing with fire are 5 years old and younger. (Children Playing with Fire, NFPA, 1/09) Intervention programs have long been concerned about the high incidence of fire misuse by these younger children and have developed intervention programs that focus on fire safety strategies for parents and caregivers. These strategies include increased supervision, the elimination of matches and lighters, modeling fire safe behaviors and setting firm rules about fire use in the home. Equally important is developing appropriate fire safety education programs for preschool children.

The Question:

In an attempt to make learning about fire safety fun during an open house or fire station tour, some have allowed preschool children to put out a live fire with a garden hose or hold a booster line to squirt water on a fire or use a fire extinguisher. What is your opinion of this educational approach for this age group?

In this issue, we look at the relationship early experiences with fire contributes to firesetting behavior later in life. In an attempt to make learning about fire safety fun during an open house or fire station tour, some departments have allowed preschool children to put out a live fire with a garden hose or hold a booster line to squirt water on a fire or use a fire extinguisher. *Hot Issues* sought the opinions about this approach from experts in the areas of child development, child psychology, and learning theory. Three nationally recognized experts in developing, re-

searching, and delivering fire education to children responded. Read their responses on pages two through four.

We pose this same question to you, our readers, who represent a multidisciplinary group of professionals committed to the education, prevention and intervention of juveniles with fire. What is your opinion of this educational approach for this age group? Participate in *Hot Issues'* Readers Poll at the link below. Results will be shared in the Spring 2010 edition of *Hot Issues*.



Tell us what you think!

Participate in *Hot Issues'* Readers Poll at:

<http://library.state.or.us/services/surveys/survey.php?sid=637>

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A juvenile with fire research perspective

by: Fireproof Children Team: Robert Cole, Ph.D., Carolyn Kourofsky, and Robert Crandall

Allowing children to put out a live fire raises three concerns. First, it does nothing to teach fire safety. Second, it contradicts one of the key messages that firefighters should give citizens: don't try to fight the fire.

According to a 2008 NFPA study, 37% of civilians injured in a structure fire were trying to fight the fire.

Third, successfully putting out a fire under highly controlled conditions can give children a sense of empowerment and control over fire. Children who feel such a sense of control, and are confident in their ability to extinguish a small fire, are more likely to engage in fireplay. A study of children's fire experience found that children ages 6 to 11 who felt a sense of control were more than three times as likely to have played with fire as those who did not have that feeling of control. For 8- and 9-year olds, those who felt a sense of control played with fire five times more than those who did not. One of the strongest factors relating to this sense of control was supervised experiences with fire – experiences similar to those that let children extinguish controlled fires. (Playing With Fire: A Developmental Assessment of Children's Fire Understanding and Experience, Grolnick, Cole, et al, Journal of Clinical Child Psychology 1990).

For younger children, the most important fire safety message is that fire and ignition materials are tools for adults only (an example for preschoolers is the *play safe! be safe!* program, see Resources). This message goes for elementary school children too. No matter how smart they are, up until about age 11 children just don't have the ability to anticipate what might go wrong. They may be able to handle the mechanics of a stove, but they don't know how to respond if something goes wrong, such as cooking grease catching fire.

The babysitting training courses sanctioned by the American Red Cross and the National Safety Council are designed for 11-to-15-year-olds, setting a national standard for the age of responsibility. Think about it—if you wouldn't let an 8-year-old babysit your children, why would you let him think he can handle fire?

“For 8 and 9 year olds, those who felt a sense of control played with fire five times more than those who did not. One of the strongest factors relating to this sense of control was ‘supervised experiences’ with fire – “



Since 1982, the Fireproof Children team has conducted extensive research into juvenile firesetting. Today their mission is injury prevention through education, research, training, global educational programs, and organizational partnerships. Fireproof Children provide research-based training and educational materials to fire departments, schools, day care centers, and community agencies. For more information about children and fire: www.fireproofchildren.com.

play safe! be safe! is a fire safety education program developed by the BIC corporation created especially for children ages three to five. For more information about the *play safe! be safe!* program visit: www.playsafebe-safe.com. The program is also available in Spanish at: www.ninossegurosminoscontentos.com/

A psychologist's perspective

by: Katie Y. Mattei, Ph.D.



Katie Y. Mattei is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Denver, CO, specializing in medically complicated and terminally ill children. She is also the clinical supervisor, with the Juvenile Firesetting Evaluation and Treatment Program at The Children's Hospital in Aurora.

Learning is most effective when matched to the child's level of emotional and cognitive development. Preschool children need to engage in learning activities that are consistent with their developmental abilities. They try to make sense of new data, and since they don't have a large depth of knowledge to draw from, they process information very differently from older children and adults.

Preschool children learn best by doing. Therefore, it is understandable that at first glance it would be a good idea to have them "act" the part of putting out a fire instead of a lecture. However, being encouraged to put out fires gives a mixed message. It indicates that it is good to stop and try to put out the fire, rather than the message of just getting out of the house.

The learning activity of putting out a fire is not appropriate, especially for preschoolers. Complicating factors include that they have:

- Less perception of danger
- Less control over their environment
- Less ability to read situations correctly (is it play or is it real?)

Other concerns for children under the age of five that they are twice as likely to die in a fire than others (2005 CDC). They have less ability to tolerate physical stress of post-burn injury – they are the primary age group at high risk for death from burn injury.

Preschoolers tend to see themselves as the center of the universe, and in doing so, cannot view things

objectively, or reason with adult-type knowledge. They also incorrectly believe that they can control fire. Being able to put out fires with firefighters lets them believe that they can do it on their own. Because they have considerable magical thinking at this age,

"being encouraged to put out fires gives mixed messages...There should be one message and one message only to this age group- 'Get out!'"

their perception dominates judgment.

Finally, fire is frightening. Neurologically, overstimulation can cause emotional pressures, which leads to poor information processing. This results in faulty decision-making. Preschoolers are characteristically ill-prepared to react in a beneficial way to life-threatening situations. Therefore, the adults in their lives need to be clear about fire safety, and not complicate it with mixed messages of when it is ok to put out a fire and when a child should leave the building.

There should be one message and one message only to this age group – "Get out!"



Firefighter Mark Gilstrap, Canton Fire Department, practices staying low and getting out with a preschool class in Canton, Ohio.

A fire educator's perspective

by: Nancy Trench



Nancy J. Trench is the Assistant Director for Research, Fire Protection Publications at Oklahoma State University where she had worked for more than 30 years. Nancy is responsible for research activities at Fire Protection Publications. She directs ongoing projects developing and delivering home fire safety programs and materials for young children and for people with disabilities. The Home Safety Council selected Mrs. Trench for the second annual Dr. Anne W. Phillips Award for Leadership in Fire Safety Education in 2008.

Young children are very concrete learners. Children cannot distinguish “putting out a fire with a garden hose” for fun from “putting out a fire with a garden hose” in an actual fire situation. I would not recommend this practice. We want children to know the RIGHT thing to do and not to confuse their decision-making with dangerous choices such as trying to put out the fire with water.

The second concern is that we teach children that firefighters have special clothing to protect them when they are putting out a fire. The live fire with no protective clothing also communicates a conflicting message for children.

I do not support portable fire extinguisher training for children of any age. Fire extinguishers are heavy and difficult to manipulate. One that is small enough for a child is too small to extinguish a fire without an expert adult operator. Portable extinguisher training may have a place with older teens who are involved with vocational or technical training such as auto mechanics or welding as part of their vocation educational objectives. Older teens may also be involved in scouting with a course of study that includes fire extinguishers along with a more comprehensive study of fire behavior.

All fire safety activities must support “GET OUTSIDE and STAY OUT.” Activities that contradict or confuse this message should not be used.

Nancy shared this true story about one teacher's experience:

A kindergarten class visited their local fire station as the culminating event of 15 classroom days of teaching and learning about fire safety. As part of the evaluation of the curriculum, the teacher had recorded the children's increasing knowledge with a web diagram. A well-intentioned fire fighter at the fire station let the children spray water out of a booster line (no real fire, just spraying water) during the fire station visit. When completing the web the next day, the children's answers to "what do you know about fire safety?" they answered "spray water on it."

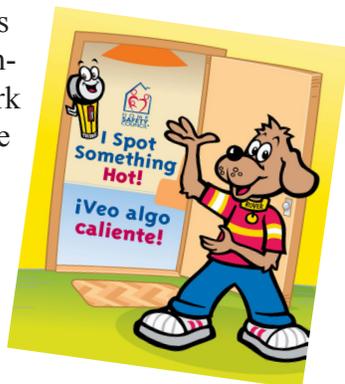
Right: Photo of the class web project showing their knowledge about fire safety.



Resources and training opportunities

Start Safe: A Fire and Burn Safety Education Program for Preschoolers and Their Families

Home Safety Council has teamed up with Weekly Reader Custom Publishing on Start Safe: A Fire and Burn Safety Program for Preschoolers and their Families. Start Safe provides resources for preschool teachers and administrators to work hand-in-hand with a local fire department. Working together, using developmentally-appropriate teaching tools from Start Safe, teachers and local fire safety experts can deliver life-saving lessons to the preschoolers. Perhaps even more importantly, they can also reach parents and caregivers with key safety messages and help them take action to reduce the risk of fires and burns at home.



Information and program materials are available from the Home Safety Council's website at: www.homesafetycouncil.org.

NBC Today Investigates: Can you stop children from playing with fire?

Home Safety Council president, Meri-K Appy and the TODAY Show went to a local classroom to teach children about the dangers of matches and lighters. The children were then left with disabled matches and lighters in the classroom to see if they would follow the lesson they'd just learned and to show parents that teaching your children isn't enough - you must lock matches and lighters away too. Visit www.homesafetycouncil.org to learn more.

The show aired September 9, 2009. TODAY videotapes are available for purchase through NBC News archives (212) 664-3797.



4th Annual Northeast Juvenile Firesetting Conference

Take-Home Tools & Effective Strategies

Thursday & Friday

May 13-14, 2010

Worcester Crowne Plaza

Worcester, MA

Hosted by: Brandon School & Residential Treatment Center, Department of Fire Services, MA Association of Safety and Fire Educators (MA SAFE) and Massachusetts Property Insurance Underwriting Association

For more information, visit:

<http://www.brandonschool.org/pathways/index.php>

MatchBook: A Journal on the Prevention and Treatment of Juvenile Firesetting

MatchBook is a professional journal and website developed to provide current practical and reliable information and resources to the diverse professional groups engaged in juvenile firesetting intervention. By providing a unifying forum for the dissemination of reliable and current firesetting prevention and intervention information to a multi-disciplinary professional audience, MatchBook provides professionals the regular opportunity to receive practical and evidence-



based information, to locate training and teaching resources, and to share emerging practices and challenges.

Visit their website at www.MatchBookJournal.org to see what's going in your discipline and email Dr. Timothy Callahan at tcallahan@brandonschool.org to get involved.



Western Juvenile with Fire Intervention Conference **CULTIVATING PARTNERSHIPS III:**

Juveniles With Fire and the Impact of Media

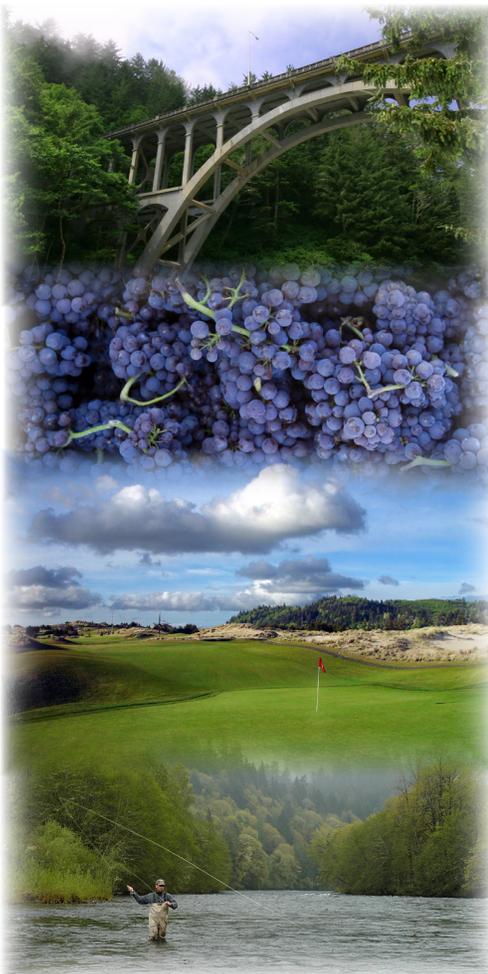
August 17 & 18, 2010

Hilton Eugene & Conference Center

Eugene, Oregon



The 2010 Western Juvenile With Fire Intervention Conference provides an opportunity to learn from experts in areas of **fire service, education, mental health, social service, law enforcement, and juvenile justice** who will share practical strategies and techniques to enhance your work with juveniles with fire.



Education sessions and networking opportunities in Eugene will help you to build practical skills and give you new solutions in your work with juveniles with fire.

Registration will soon be available at:
www.oregon.gov/OSP/SFM/JFSI_Home.shtml

Eugene is located in the heart of the Willamette Valley between the beautiful Oregon coast and the majestic Cascade Mountains. You'll appreciate the warm welcome of the community, the spectacular natural setting, abundant recreational opportunities, and the professional,



yet personalized service for which our area is known. We think you'll find such a wide variety of activities and adventures that you'll want to spend a few extra days and bring family along! As you make your travel plans, we encourage you to explore more of what Eugene has to offer at: www.TravelLaneCounty.org/firesetter.

The 2010 Western Juvenile With Fire Intervention Conference is sponsored by FireSafe Children and Families, the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal and the Oregon Burn Center in coalition with the San Diego Burn Institute and Denver Children's Hospital.

Western Juvenile with Fire Intervention Conference
CULTIVATING PARTNERSHIPS III: Juveniles With Fire and the Impact of Media
August 17 & 18, 2010
Hilton Eugene & Conference Center
Eugene, Oregon
Call for Presentations

The 2010 Western Juvenile With Fire Intervention Conference Committee is soliciting presenters and workshops for this conference, which is theme-based on the impact of media on the prevention, education, and intervention of juveniles with fire. Join us next summer in Oregon for the largest conference on the West Coast that focuses on prevention and intervention resources for youth misusing fire. This conference attracts a multi-disciplinary audience of professionals including mental health, fire service, law enforcement, child welfare, juvenile justice and education.

Presenters:

Experts in the areas of **fire service, education, mental health, social service, law enforcement, and juvenile justice** are invited to submit abstracts for conference presentations and workshops. Workshops should be 1.5 or 3 hours in length. The conference committee is looking for presentations that are evidence-based representing best practice in intervention strategies and are interactive providing participants with skills or materials to take back to their community programs.

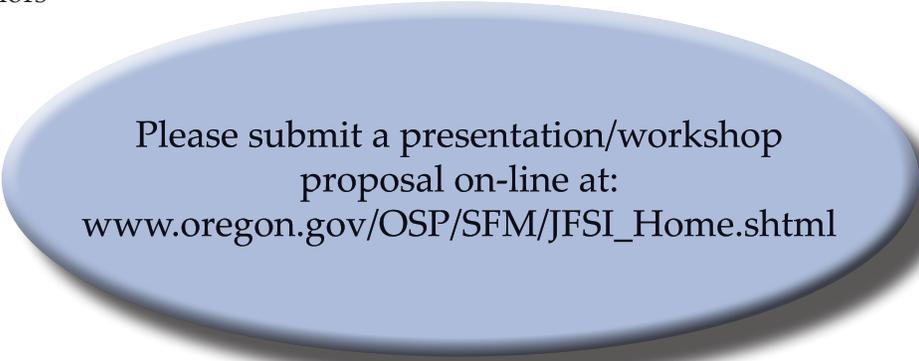
Topics of Interest:

Media continues to play an increasing role in our personal and professional lives. The conference is broadly focused on the impact of media on youth, particularly juveniles with fire, and the professionals working with them. Presentations/Workshops are welcome in a wide range of topics including, but not limited to, the following:

- Prevention Education for Middle and High School Students
- Preschool Programs
- Innovative Treatment Strategies for Residential Treatment Centers
- Mental Health Assessment Tools
- Female Juveniles With Fire
- Research on Abuse and Firesetting Behaviors
- Parenting Programs
- Educational and/or Therapeutic Games
- Recidivism Studies
- Collecting and Analyzing Data
- Social Networking
- The Internet and Youth Today
- Burn Hospital Intervention
- Program Evaluation
- Program Funding/Grant Writing

Presenters will receive:

- Waiver of conference fees
- Two nights lodging at the Eugene Hilton and Conference Center
- Conference meals



Please submit a presentation/workshop
proposal on-line at:
www.oregon.gov/OSP/SFM/JFSI_Home.shtml

For more information, contact the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal's Juvenile With Fire Intervention Program at Firesetter.Intervention@state.or.us or by calling Judy Okulitch, Program Manager, at (503) 934-8230



Helen Feroli and Judy Okulitch of the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal Juvenile With Fire Intervention Program

Hot Issues has a new editor and a new look

by Judith Okulitch

I am happy to introduce Helen Feroli, the new editor of *Hot Issues* and the Training and Development Specialist for the Juvenile with Fire Program at the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal. Helen returns to Oregon, her home state, after working in Massachusetts and North Carolina in social services and mental health. Helen brings with her exciting ideas on moving the intervention program forward here in Oregon.

As one of her first tasks, Helen redesigned *Hot Issues*, a quarterly publication that has focused on innovative and best practice approaches in juvenile firesetter intervention since 1990. This is also the first edition that

will be sent entirely by email to thousands of new and long-time subscribers. We hope you like this new look. I am delighted to have Helen on the OSFM team. To submit articles, events or comments for the April issue of *Hot Issues*, contact Helen at Helen.Feroli@state.or.us.

Editor's note: Judith Okulitch has been coordinating Oregon's juvenile firesetter intervention program since 1990. The Office of State Fire Marshal is a division of Oregon State Police.

Updates on novelty lighter legislation across the nation

California

In Fall 2009, *Hot Issues* reported the California State Senate had voted in support of legislation banning the sell, distribution and offering for promotion an operable novelty lighter (AB 625). Despite widespread support, the bill was vetoed Gov. Schwarzenegger who stated in a memo to the California State Senate, "While reducing the risks of accidental fires is important, there is simply no evidence that novelty lighters are any more to blame for incidents of accidental fires than other types of lighters or matches. In addition, this measure would place additional burdens on both state and local authorities at a time of severe budget reductions."

New Jersey

In November 2009, Gov. Jon Corzine of New Jersey signed Assembly Bill 3207 into law. The bill

prohibits the sale of novelty lighters defined as lighters "especially attractive to children 19 years of age or younger, due to a toylike design" and included lighters "designed to resemble any cartoon



character, animal, musical instrument, toy, gun, watch, vehicle, tool, fire extinguisher, food, or beverage" or with features "such as buttons or devices that initiate audio or visual effects, flashing lights, or musical sounds, which may encourage a child to play with or use the lighter." New Jersey is the tenth state to pass legislation to ban or limit the sale of novelty and

toylike lighters (USFA). Way to go New Jersey!

Massachusetts

Massachusetts State House completed their third (3rd) reading of House Bill H4369 which proposes banning the sale of novelty cigarette lighters that could appeal to children. The House gave initial approval to the bill, which would bar novelty lighters from being manufactured, sold or given away in Massachusetts. The bill carries penalties of up to a \$1,000 fine, or a year in jail, or both.

Please visit USFA's website for up-to-date information about novelty and toylike lighters: www.usfa.dhs.gov/noveltylighters

International Update

The Government of South Australia has declared toy-like lighters to be dangerous goods and banned their sale. For more information visit: www.ocba.sa.gov.au