

Juvenile Firesetters Program

History:

- This program was started in November 1995
- Research into the overall role of child fire setting had only recently started then
- Prior to 1970 all children involved in fire setting were assumed seriously disturbed. In reality, only about 1/3 of all children who start fires are in need of professional counseling. Even fewer are considered seriously disturbed.
- By age 13, fifty percent of ALL children have engaged in fire play of some form.
- This program is based on this new understanding. Studies have shown that an educational solution can reduce the number of fires started by children.

Fire: People and Dollars:

- Fire can be expected to kill 6000-8000 people this year (not counting firefighters).
- Fire is the second leading cause of fatal home accidents and the number one cause of fatal home accidents among children.
- There can be an expected 2.5 million reported fire incidents nationwide with a direct property loss of approximately 8.5 billion dollars.

Arson:

- 23 percent of all fires are incendiary (definitely set) or suspicious (probably set).....ARSON
- Many times the arsonist is a child. Between 50-60% of suspected arson fires are set by children. This number may be low because:
 - Young children cannot be charged with arson. In some states, Texas included, a child under the age of 10 cannot be charged. In other states the age is 7.
 - Many fires, usually small, are not reported at all. The number of unreported fires could be as high as ten times the number of reported fires.

Who Are the Children That Start Fires?

- Statistically they are:
 - Boys more than girls.
 - They are young. 71% are under 10. 17% are under 5.
 - Are likely to be from poor family. This is due to increased stress on the child and the tendency to have less supervision.
 - The majority will have no serious intellectual or emotional handicaps.

Why Do Children Start Fires?

- **CURIOSITY** – This is the most common reason found. When curiosity is the reason, the child will generally show remorse about a fire that they could not put out themselves. This child can usually be helped with educational intervention.
- **SENSE OF CONTROL** – Most children believe, incorrectly, that they can keep a small fire from spreading.

- **EASY ACCESS TO MATCHES OR LIGHTERS** – Matches are used in 61.5% of the time with a lighter being used 30%. Lighters tend to be preferred by children age 5 or younger. Lighter manufacturing companies have recently begun addressing this problem.
- **CRY FOR HELP** – Children will use fire to express anger or frustration, seek revenge, and to call attention to themselves or to a difficult circumstance. These children generally do not show any remorse for a fire they have started. In these cases professional counseling is required.

What Can Be Done?

- Implement fire education programs, such as the Carrollton Fire Department Fire Safety Academy, that teach preventive fire behavior.
- Provide specific intervention for individual children who exhibit more dangerous fire behavior.
- Provide specific intervention for the parents of these children to help them teach and stress fire safety.
- Provide contacts with various community agencies to families with problems that cannot be addressed by educational intervention alone.

Fire Safety Academy:

- The Fire Safety Academy is designed to teach fire safe behavior to children with known previous fire play activity. Parental support is crucial to the success of this program. Parents must continue to stress fire safe practices to their children.
- The cost of implementing the Fire Safety Academy is typically modest, measured mostly in time and effort. The cost of not implementing this program is anything but modest. Using data from the National Fire Protection Association, the dollar value associated with child set fires averages \$16,000. The cost to the community in added fire fighting resources and high fire insurance premiums is significant and the lost human potential due to preventable fire deaths is beyond measure.

Youths that play with fire or maliciously set fires have become a major issue for the Carrollton Fire Prevention Division. Fires involving youth's total 55% of the fires determined to be arson in our city, with property damage in excess of several hundred thousand dollars every year.

The Carrollton Fire Department has developed an alternative approach to help these youths without sending them directly into the juvenile justice system.

The **YOUTH FIRESETTERS PROGRAM** consists of two phases. Initially, the youth and parent attend an evaluation interview to help the fire fighter assigned to the case learn more about the behavior of the child. The second phase involves having the child and parent attend a fire safety academy presented by trained fire fighters. The academy presented by trained fire fighters. The academy stresses fire safety for both child and parent.

We need to help children understand the dangers of fire setting and meet the needs of children who are curious about fire or look at fire setting as a way to vent frustration, get attention, run away from problems, or just to destroy property of others.

WE ARE HERE TO HELP:

The Carrollton Fire Prevention Division wants to serve as your resource on fire safety information. Our firefighters are committed to the future of the children in our city. We have a variety of safety information material that can be obtained free of charge. We also have a staff of dedicated personnel available to answer your questions.