CHILDREN PLAYING WITH FIRE

NFPA Facts & Figures*

- In 1999, children playing with fire started 41,900 fires that were reported to U.S. fire departments, causing an estimated 165 civilian deaths, 1,900 civilian injuries, and $272 million in direct property damage.
- Most of the people killed in child-playing fires are under five, and such fires are the leading cause of fire deaths among preschoolers.
- Roughly three out of every four child-playing fires—and at least four-fifths of associated deaths and injuries—involve matches or lighters.
- Children also start fires by playing with candles, stoves, fireworks, and cigarettes.
- Among fatal home fires started by children playing, three out of five involve children igniting bedding, mattresses, upholstered furniture, or clothing.
- Just over half of child-playing fires in the home start in a bedroom.
- Children who start fires may be children in crisis, with the fires acting as cries for help from stressful life experiences or abuse, according to studies of fire-setting behavior.
- As of 1999, deaths in child-playing fires had declined by 60 percent since 1994, when the child-resistant lighter standard went into effect.

Safety Tips

- Store matches and lighters out of children's reach and sight, up high, preferably in a locked cabinet
- Never use lighters or matches as a source of amusement for children. They may imitate what you do
- If your child expresses curiosity about fire or has been playing with fire, calmly but firmly explain that matches and lighters are tools for adults only
- Use only lighters designed with child-resistant features and store up high in a locked cabinet
- Teach young children to tell an adult if they see matches or lighters, and teach school-age children to bring any matches or lighters to an adult
- Never leave matches or lighters in a bedroom or any place where children may go without supervision
- If you suspect your child is intentionally setting fires or is unduly fascinated with fire, get help immediately. Your local fire department, school, or community counseling agency can put you in touch with experts trained to help

The following should be considered as a plan of action for properties that would be evacuated in an emergency:

- Designate a building “captain” to lead efforts for each building. Provide the captain with an updated list of the tenants in the building to allow the captain (or a designated alternate) to take a headcount in the event of an evacuation. Establish meeting points for each building at a safe distance (at least 300 feet)
- Conduct a pre-announced drill of building evacuation for each location; repeat on at least a semi-annual basis
- Invite your local fire department to present fire prevention information to residents

Stress education with children, including the dangers of playing with matches and what to do in case of a fire. Consider promotions such as safety poster contests for youth to promote fire prevention awareness.

The NFPA website (http://www.nfpa.org/catalog/home/index.asp) also contains material for promoting Fire Prevention Week (First week in October).

For further assistance on this matter or other safety and risk control issues, contact your risk management consultant or Jim Rhoads, NJPHA-JIF safety consultant (610-397-5061).

***From NFPA's *Children Playing with Fire*, November 2003**

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