

# HOT Issues

A publication of the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal's Youth Fire Prevention and Intervention Program



## Diamonds in the Microwave?

An incident involving two teen girls attempting to make diamonds in the microwave suggests accountability and parent education as useful intervention strategies. The teens involved in this incident are not typical firesetting youth. They are good students from well-respected families and did not intend to cause a fire that all but destroyed the kitchen in one of their homes. Yet, they were allowed to surf the internet without supervision and given permission by a parent

who unknowingly allowed them to engage in dangerous fire behavior.

In an attempt to earn extra credit in their high school science class, the

teens searched the internet for project ideas. They happened upon a YouTube™ video featuring two hip-hop jewelers demonstrating how to make diamonds in the microwave. The girls shared the idea with one of the teen's mother who approved of the project. The mother helped the girls write a shopping list, and instructed the girls to wait for her to come home from work before purchasing supplies and making the diamonds.

Anxious to get started, the girls chose not to wait before beginning the project. They went to a local store to purchase the items needed (charcoal briquettes, lighter fluid, a barbecue lighter and peanut butter) and followed the directions from the video. The girls chose to make the diamonds using the microwave in the kitchen and ignored the recommendation to take the microwave outside

as advised in the video. The girls attempt did not create the beautiful, pre-cut diamonds shown in the video rather it caused the microwave to ignite a kitchen fire. Luckily, the girls were not injured.

After the homeowner's insurance agency determined the amount of loss, the mother sought to hold the local hardware store accountable for selling her daughter white gas instead of lighter fluid. Yes, the store should have a policy that would prevent selling fire tools and related items to youth. However, the mother and the teens made multiple poor decisions that led to the costly incident. Although she had told the girls to wait for her to be home, the mother had approved of the project. In doing so, she demonstrated a lack of knowledge about fire science and fire prevention. She and the girls trusted information found on the web without conducting further research or consulting with either the fire department or the youth's science teacher with expertise in the area. Regardless of their intent, the teens exercised poor decision making by purchasing the items and beginning a project involving fire without an adult being present.

An appropriate response would be to distribute the accountability by providing fire education and intervention strategies to all involved. What strategies would you employ? How are you addressing the impact of social media on youth firesetting behavior in your community? To what extent does parent education play a role in your juvenile firesetting intervention program?

Share your response with Hot Issues by participating in the on-line survey at: [http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/HI\\_Spring\\_Summer\\_2011\\_survey](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/HI_Spring_Summer_2011_survey)



## HOT ISSUES SPOTLIGHT:

### Washington County Juvenile Department, Washington County, Oregon

by Barbara Newcomb

The Juvenile with Fire Intervention Network in Washington County, Oregon represents a partnership between local law enforcement, fire service, juvenile department, mental health agencies, and Fire Safe Children and Families. Through collaborative efforts, network partners are able to identify, educate, and hold youth involved accountable for their offenses. Frequently, these fire offenses occur at schools, in parks, on public sidewalks/streets, and near homes and apartment complexes. In an average year, Washington County Juvenile Department receives referrals from law enforcement on 50 youth who have acted irresponsibly with fire.

The case of Joe and John is typical of those referred to the Washington County Department for a fire-related offense. On an evening in 2010, the two 15 year old boys were hanging out together in their neighborhood following a high school football game. Neither Joe nor John had ever been in trouble with the law. After the game, they walked to the local elementary school where they made the decision to build a campfire. They gathered bark chips, paper and debris which they set on the play structure table. Using a lighter, Joe ignited the pile. An alarmed neighbor called the police when he saw the boys and flames from his home across the street. Police and fire were dispatched to the scene and both boys were referred to the juvenile department. Consequences enforced by the juvenile department included having both boys being screened using Oregon's *Juvenile with Fire Screening Tool* at the fire department, perform community service work, pay restitution and successfully complete the *SAFETY* education program run by Fire Safe Children and Families.

The *SAFETY* program is an eight week (16 hour) course for court-referred youth, 12 – 17 years of age, led by a court counselor and firefighter. In addition to lessons on fire science, fire safety, and fire in the media; the course focuses on the

legal consequences of misusing fire, cognitive skill development, anger management, and accountability. In a group setting, youth explore the emotional and financial impact their decisions have had on their victims, their families, and their community. Through the course, youth learn to take responsibility for their fire offense and to make better decisions about their behavior. At the conclusion of the course, each youth must demonstrate accountability for their actions by presenting their story to their group of peers and parents.

By offering the *SAFETY* program, Washington County Juvenile Department is supporting best practice and making their communities safer. The recidivism rate of youth who have completed the course is less than 1%. At an average cost of \$400 per youth for the 8 week course, this is a relatively low-cost way to address the specific issues and concerns that arise when youth choose to misuse fire.

*Barbara Newcomb has worked with the Washington County Juvenile Department for 20 years. She has represented the juvenile department on the Washington County Juvenile with Fire Intervention Network (JFIN) for 14 years, and has chaired the network since 2007. Every successful network needs at least one 'spark plug'; a person to initiate and promote network activities, who is committed to the network, and willing to invest both time and energy to ensure its success. Barbara Newcomb is the 'spark plug' for the Washington County JFIN. In recognition of her years of service and ongoing commitment to youth who misuse fire the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal awarded Barbara with an Award of Excellence in August, 2010.*

# Retooling Fire Prevention Education - *Part III*

by Judith S. Okulitch, Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal

National Health Education Standards (NHES) identify characteristics of effective health education leading to positive behavioral outcomes. Several of these characteristics can be easily integrated into fire education programs. The goal is for students to receive evidence-based fire prevention education and for them to adopt, practice and maintain positive fire-safe behaviors over a lifetime. The Fall 2010 edition of Hot Issues focused on specific behavioral outcomes, and addressing social pressures and influences. This edition explores the following:

- **Build personal and social competence:** Fire safety lessons should help students make life-long fire-safe decisions and reduce risk-taking behaviors. Lessons could provide opportunities for students to analyze and think through fire scenarios, communicate their ideas, and make better personal and collective decisions about fire safety.

Almost every fire department in the country helps students to develop home escape plans. A good extension of this lesson would be to have students discuss how to escape a fire in community buildings such as in a shopping mall, in a church, a movie theatre or a restaurant. Students can observe and report back to their class on the location of exit signs in these facilities and the challenge of evacuating many people in the event of a fire or other disaster.

Lessons should empower students to act responsibly with fire and emergency preparedness activities and situations. Middle and high school students can learn about and participate in Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT). This is an effective way for them to demonstrate personal competence and contribute to the welfare of their community.

- **Provide functional knowledge:** Assessing fire knowledge is one way to evaluate a student's understanding of fire. Teaching fireworks safety is a good example of the need to provide more than functional knowledge. Students can be tested to determine what types of fireworks are legal or illegal in their state and how to use fireworks in a safe manner. This lesson can be enhanced by teaching the consequences of making a decision to use illegal fireworks or use fireworks in unsafe ways encourages them to assess the possible risks involved. These risks include the potential for injury and property loss, as well as the legal implications of buying and setting off illegal fireworks. The goal is to help them develop the skills to assess a dangerous behavior, mitigate the risk and make fire smart decisions that then can be applied to other behaviors.
- **Provide age appropriate and developmentally appropriate information, strategies, teaching methods and materials:** Age-appropriate education needs to include different messages for preschoolers, elementary, middle and high school students, and adults.

Oklahoma University conducted research to identify age-appropriate fire safety messages for preschoolers. Findings suggest that 'Stop, Drop, & Roll' may not be appropriate to teach preschoolers. Children between the ages of 3 and 5 years old cannot comprehend and remember a three step command. They can model the behavior, but they could not, in the event of an emergency, remember to perform the behavior. This discovery alone should prompt us to question other fire safety messages and determine their age appropriateness.

The next edition of Hot Issues will provide further suggestions on integrating characteristics of effective health education into your fire education program.



In 2010, Oregon was selected as one of 12 states to participate in a national train-the-trainers program for *Start Safe: A Fire and Burn Safety Program for Preschoolers and Their Families*. Judy Okulitch and Helen Feroli of the Oregon Office of State

Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive. One participant shared, “[This is a] great training. Everything is laid out clearly.” Headstart programs unable to participate during the 2010-2011 school year have begun to schedule fall trainings. Six trainings have already been scheduled for September and October.

*Start Safe: A Fire and Burn Safety Program for Preschoolers and Their Families* provides resources for preschool teachers and administrators to work hand-in-hand with a local fire department in delivering developmentally-appropriate fire safety education to children 3 – 6 years old. *Start Safe* was created by the Home Safety Council, in partnership with the National Head Start Association and Weekly Reader. The program was funded in part through a generous grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/FEMA.

Fire Marshal’s (OSFM) Youth Fire Prevention and Intervention Program joined representatives from the fire service and Head Start programs across the country at the 27th Annual Parent Conference of the National Head Start Association in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Following the national training, OSFM partnered with Oregon Safe Kids to fulfill the commitment of training at least three local communities to prepare them in implementing Start Safe.

The response from Oregon’s fire service and Head Start programs has been remarkable! To date, 213 members of Oregon’s fire service and Head Start programs representing 46 communities have participated in the 8 *Start Safe* trainings conducted.



Above: *Start Safe* class at Pacific Northwest Prevention Workshop in Glenden Beach, Oregon - February 2011.

Below: *Start Safe* class at the Oregon Child Development Center in Milton-Freewater Oregon - April 2011.



*Start Safe* recognizes home fire safety as an adult responsibility. Reaching parents and caregivers is critical so changes can be made in the home.

*Start Safe* has been specifically designed to help teachers and fire educators to reach parent and caregivers with key safety messages and help them take action to reduce the risk of fires and burns at home.

For more information about the

*Start Safe* program, visit the Home Safety Council’s website at:

[http://www.homesafetycouncil.org/AboutUs/Programs/pr\\_startsafe\\_w003.asp](http://www.homesafetycouncil.org/AboutUs/Programs/pr_startsafe_w003.asp)

**SAVE THE DATE!**

**Cultivating Partnerships IV:  
2011 Annual Western Juvenile with Fire Intervention  
Conference**

**November 10 & 11, 2011**

**DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Ontario Airport  
Ontario, California**

Experts from fire service, law enforcement, juvenile justice, and behavior health will present on topics such as:

- JFS Assessment and Psychological Evaluation Tools
- Child Drawing Interpretation
- Play Therapy
- School Fires



For more information, contact:

Fabianne Furman at 858-541-2277, ext. 13, or [ffurman@burninstitute.org](mailto:ffurman@burninstitute.org)

The 2011 Western Juvenile with Fire Conference is co-sponsored by the following agencies:



## National Juvenile Firesetting Database – Is It Needed? Can It Be Done?

by Fabianne Furman, The Burn Institute

A current hot issue in the realm of juvenile firesetting is the notion of creating a juvenile with fire national database, a collection of information about youth who have intentionally used fire inappropriately. Information collected would include factors about the youth such as his/her age, gender and ethnicity, and perhaps information about the youth's medical condition, family status, and academic performance. It should also include information about the fire itself such as the location of the incident, ignition source, scale of damages, and any injuries or deaths incurred.

The subject of such a database was addressed at a panel discussion entitled, *National Juvenile Database – Is It Needed? Can It Be Done?* at the 43rd annual American Burn Association Meeting this past March. Panelists included Dave Gulledge, Data Unit Manager of the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal; Paul Schwartzman, M.S. from Finger Lakes Regional Burn Association; Martin King, Assistant Chief from West Allis Fire Department; and Detective John Lowman, Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialist from the Highland Park Police Department. Each panelist shared important information regarding the benefits and challenges that a national database would incur.

Panelists agreed that a national database would be beneficial for identifying trends in juvenile firesetting, which would in turn provide great advantages to law enforcement and fire service. Advantages include helping law enforcement and fire service identify juveniles at risk of firesetting behaviors, recommend national codes and standards, and focus research and public education efforts. The database could assist in an agencies response to arson and therefore help prevent injuries, deaths, and/or damages. Moreover, it would allow for better tracking of repeat offenders who have relocated, and better surveillance of neighborhoods that are at high risk for incidents of arson.

On the other hand, a national database comes with a number of challenges. Gulledge points out

that while the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal currently uses an online database, Fire and EMS Bridge\*, it would be difficult to create a uniform system across all fifty states as laws vary from state to state. Furthermore, it would be challenging to enforce the use of such a system as the agency responsible and method for inputting the information may vary within and between states. According to King, while most agencies agree that a national database would be advantageous, it is difficult to determine if it "should be just a database with basic identifiers, or a tracking mechanism, or both" once it crosses state lines.

Perhaps the most important controversy related to a juvenile firesetter national database revolves around the issue of juvenile privacy. Due to this issue alone, Lowman is doubtful that such a database would ever come into existence, claiming that state police in Illinois would not be permitted to publish juvenile information in a public or private database. Further, the risk of exposing a juvenile's privacy may deter parents from willingly referring their children to organizations such as the Burn Institute for intervention services.

A possible solution to these challenges is an anonymous system that would track trends in juvenile firesetting without revealing the juvenile's personal information. Lowman contends that a national database should only include identifiers related to the juvenile and the incident (e.g. ethnicity, gender, location, ignition source), but no personal identifiers. Such a system would therefore only be useful in indentifying and track trends, but could not be used as a mechanism to track individual youth.

King feels that the best formula for creating a juvenile firesetter national database would be to determine which state has the most effective system, and then adapt that system so that it could be reproduced across the country. In this case, perhaps personal identifiers would be maintained only at the state level and then removed from the national database to protect juveniles' privacy, while information about firesetting trends would remain.

## JFS National Database: Is it Attainable?

by Martin M. King

This issue of a juvenile firesetter database has been taught for decades and is part of most curriculums offered on juvenile firesetter intervention programs (JFIP). The reason behind the creation of a database is to document the firesetting problem within a community and report the results to the community. There has been talk about creating a database that could be shared within a region or state. Though some have been created, there is not one that is used across the country. While we have seen some states take the lead, there has been no coordination of a national database by a national organization.

In September 2010, I attended a class at the National Fire Academy and had the honor of having lunch with the United States Fire Administrator, Glenn Gaines. As a side note, this sounds like quite a special invitation, but Chief Gaines often eats lunch at the Dining Hall while at the USFA and sits with the students and staff rather than in a special dining room. We were discussing my involvement with two NFA courses - Demonstrating Your Fire Prevention Program's Worth and Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialist I & II - and the application of performance measurements within JFIP. Chief Gaines stressed the importance of creating a database system to provide information about this problem. We briefly discussed some of the issues that have prohibited the project in the past, mainly time and money (to keep this brief). He questioned why the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) could not be utilized since it tracked juveniles involved with fire incidents.

The NFIRS system was designed to document fire service activity through a national standard for the collection of specific information for dissemination to show national, regional and state fire problems. The system relies on fire departments purchasing and utilizing software for documenting their responses. It also relies on these departments submitting the information, and hopefully utilizing the system for comparison of their data with the national, regional or state informa-

tion. While the system collects information on juveniles involved with fires, this is limited to responses by the fire department. Most programs will identify that a majority of JFIP participants come from referrals outside the fire service and were not part of a fire response. There are a number of programs that are not run by the fire service and they would not have access to this system.

After the discussion with Chief Gaines, I volunteered to work on an applied research project on the creation of a database system. My belief was that there were some state database programs that could lead to the development of a standardized reporting format. This information would need to be evaluated by a group of national experts to assure agreement on the standardized format. The collection system is a larger problem, but part of the research would look at the use of National Fire Data Center Branch of the United States Fire Administration or alternative system for collection and dissemination of the data.

I need your assistance in identifying existing data collection resources, mainly regional or state databases and the reporting form or format. This information can be sent to the following:

Assistant Chief Martin M. King, EFO  
West Allis Fire Department  
7332 West National Avenue  
West Allis, WI 53214  
(414) 302-8904 (414) 302-8927 FAX  
mking@westalliswi.gov

This information will assist with the completion of the applied research project. This information will be shared with the fire service through this and other venues.

\* To learn more about Fire and EMS Bridge, Oregon's web-based data collection program, read Hot Issues' Spring 2010 available on the OSFM's website at: [http://www.oregon.gov/OSP/SFM/docs/Comm\\_Ed/Hot\\_Issues/Hi\\_Spring\\_10.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/OSP/SFM/docs/Comm_Ed/Hot_Issues/Hi_Spring_10.pdf)

## Hawaii, Maryland, Nebraska, and New York seek to join 14 states in banning novelty lighters

### Hawaii:

Representative Ryan Yamane introduced House Bill 604, which prohibits the sale and distribution of novelty lighters. Senator Willie C. Espero introduced a similar bill, Senate Bill 173.

### Maryland:

Senator Barry Glassman introduced Senate Bill 112, which would prohibit a person from selling at retail, offering for sale at retail, or distributing for retail sale novelty lighters. Maryland Delegate James E. Malone, Jr. introduced similar legislation in the House of Delegates (House Bill 192).

### Nebraska:

Senator Russ Karpisek introduced Senate Bill 469, which prohibits the retail sale of novelty lighters and provides a penalty.

### New York:

Assemblyman Audrey I. Pheffer introduced Assembly Bill 1981, which prohibits the retail sale and distribution of novelty lighters.

The following 14 states have passed legislation banning the sale and distribution of novelty lighters:

Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, and Washington.

Hot Issues encourages you to visit The U.S. Fire Administration's website for detailed, up-to-date information about novelty lighter legislation:

[www.usfa.dhs.gov/noveltylighters](http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/noveltylighters)

## Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialist 1 Training (NFPA 1035)

The Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal Youth Fire Prevention and Intervention Program is providing training for NFPA 1035: Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialist 1. This two-day course includes an overview of Oregon's Juvenile with Fire Intervention program, including policies, procedures and laws, child development and communication, practice using the *Oregon Juvenile with Fire Screening Tool*, intervention options including educational strategies and referral procedures, networking steps and data collection.

This is the only class accepted by Department of Public Safety Standards and Training for National Fire Protection Association 1035 certification as Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialist 1 in Oregon. All participants will receive a certificate of completion indicating 14 hours of professional development training and are required to complete a task book for certification in Oregon.

When: August 17th & 18th, 2011

8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. (both days)

Where: Portland Area (TBD)

Instructors: Judy Okulitch, OSFM

Joe Troncoso, Portland Fire Bureau

For more information, contact Judy Okulitch at 503-934-8230 or [judy.okulitch@state.or.us](mailto:judy.okulitch@state.or.us).

