

Juvenile Firesetting

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How many parents say, “Not my kid?” “My child would never start a fire!” It is an issue of concern and it benefits everyone to be part of the solution.

The Extent of the Problem: Juvenile Firesetting (2003 -Home Safety Council)

- Approximately 40,000 structure fires
- 2000 civilian injuries
- 500 civilian deaths
- \$1 billion dollars in direct property damage
- 49% of all arson arrests in the U.S. are children ages 18 and under
- One-third of all children killed by fire, set the fires themselves
- Left untreated, 81% of the firesetters will repeat their actions

What can parents and communities do to help?

It starts with giving children the basic tools of preventing fires.

Key strategies

Supervision-

- Although it is impossible to be with your child at all times, lack of supervision is a common thread in kids who start fires. They say things like, “I was bored”, “and I just wanted to see what would happen”! Children model behavior. Remember they are watching you when you work with fire.

Accessibility- Have you ever thought about where the match and lighters are kept in your house? Does your child have access to these places?

- Limiting access is vital. Consider matches and lighters as dangerous as guns when it comes to children; keep them locked up! This way you can limit access, as well as preventing their curiosity from being tempted.
- Blaine and Mounds View have city ordinances that are part of the solution. The ordinances prohibit the possession of matches or lighters, or any ignition device with anyone under 18 years of age.
- Child Resistant lighters

Education-

- Teach children that matches and lighters are tools not toys. Only adults should use the tools of fire. Discuss with children the dangers of fire and the consequences of experimentation.

Having a safe home environment-

- Install smoke alarms and a residential fire sprinkler system in your home
- Regularly inspect your home for fire hazards or call the fire department for a *free* Home Safety Survey. Make an appointment by calling the Spring Lake Park-Blaine-Mounds View Fire Department @763-767-4003.
- Plan and practice home fire escape drills.

When you see an abnormal amount of interest in fire or actual fire behavior in your child, it is time to reach out for help. We have come a long way from our views on how to help a child with fire behavior. We feel strongly that scare tactics, tours of the fire station or

ignoring the issue are ineffective ways. Often fire behavior is a cry out for help. *We all need to listen.*

A national expert on juvenile firesetting, Irene Pinsonneault, put it bluntly, “The one thing that all incarcerated arsonists and institutionalized pyromaniacs have in common is, they traced their fire-setting history back to when they were just 3 and 4 years old and they were just playing with matches.”

If have questions, call the Spring Lake Park-Blaine-Mounds View Fire Department @ 763-767-4003.