



JUVENILE FIRE SAFETY PROGRAM

The majority of child-set fires are started out of curiosity, not malice; yet, the damage they cause, in both economic and human costs, is real and devastating. For example:*

- ◆ Fires involving juveniles caused over 8 million dollars in damages each year in Wisconsin alone.
- ◆ In the United States over 100,000 fires annually are set by juveniles.
- ◆ Children make up roughly 25% of all fire deaths.
- ◆ Over 30% of the fires that kill children are set by children playing with fire.

Due to these startling statistics, the Oshkosh Fire Department has developed the Juvenile Fire Safety (JFS) Program. This program was designed to educate the families of our community to the realities of fire and to give them the tools necessary to change this dangerous behavior.

* All statistics 2001 United States Fire Administration (USFA).

CURIOSITY OR CONCERN?

Children are naturally curious about things they don't understand—including fire. Therefore, how does a parent know whether their child's interest in fire is cause for concern?

Some warning signs are:

- ◆ Playing with matches or lighters
- ◆ Trying to burn things
- ◆ Lying about his/her involvement in a known fire-setting episode
- ◆ Stockpiling of flammable materials
- ◆ Finding unexplained burnt matches or materials
- ◆ Extreme interest in fire

Parents who become aware of any of the above warning signs should take it very seriously. Immediate acknowledgement along with effective educational intervention is crucial to alleviating this behavior.

HOW DOES THE JFS PROGRAM WORK?

The Oshkosh Fire Department offers families assistance in dealing with juvenile fire-setters. An interview will be conducted by trained personnel with both the parent(s) and the child(ren) to determine the severity of the problem and a plan of action to deal with it. If the situation involves an accidental fire or a fire set out of curiosity, the JFS Program is offered to the family at no cost. This class provides information on the proper use of fire as well as fire safety and prevention practices. The sessions are approximately a half hour in length and are held weekly until the instructor is satisfied that the child is no longer a threat to him/herself or his/her family (usually about 4 or 5 sessions are necessary).

If the extent of the fire-setting problem is beyond the scope of the JFS Program we can also assist the family by referring them to other available community resources.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- ◆ Lead by example. You cannot expect your child to treat fire any differently than you do.
- ◆ Explain to children why they cannot use fire. Simply saying, “DON’T” is not enough.
- ◆ Treat matches and lighters like the tools that they are. Give them the same respect you would give to other dangerous tools (knives, power tools, etc.) that are in your house.
- ◆ Keep matches and lighters out of the reach of children.
- ◆ Punishment and scare tactics will not satisfy a child’s curiosity about fire. Education is the best means to prevention.
- ◆ Reward children for the correct choices/behaviors regarding matches and lighters.

Take the initiative! If you feel your child has developed an unhealthy fascination with fire, call the Public Education Division today at 236-5249.



**Multiple fatality fire in Oshkosh set by a juvenile.
The child who lit the fire was one of the fatalities.**