

# SMFO's Assistance

## Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program

The State Fire Marshal's Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program (JFIP) was developed to assist fire departments in the establishment of community-based intervention programs. The JFIP provides information, material and technical assistance to new and existing local programs.

The SFMO and its Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Advisory Team offer a model program for local fire departments. Upon request, the SFMO will conduct workshops to train fire service personnel in the use of the model program and related topics. Topics covered by the workshops include

- program management
- identifying juvenile firesetters
- interview/evaluation tools and techniques
- educational intervention
- referrals
- relationships with juvenile justice

Workshops are conducted, free of charge, in or near the cities of fire departments wishing to establish their own juvenile firesetter intervention programs. The workshops are approved for TCFP, TCLEOSE and CSWE continuing education credit.

The SFMO also makes available a JFIP database software program that it developed as a tool for local intervention programs and to enable the statewide collection of data on juvenile firesetting and fireplay.

**A JUVENILE FIRESETTER INTERVENTION PROGRAM PLAYS** an important role in the community. For more information about juvenile firesetting or to request a workshop in your community, contact

### State Fire Marshal's Office

#### Juvenile Firesetter Intervention

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Web site: <http://www.tdi.state.tx.us>

### Other SFMO services

- Fire/Arson Investigations
- Arson Hotline **1-877-4FIRE45**  
(1-877-434-7354)
- Canine Teams
- Forensic Arson Laboratory
- Mobile Response Unit
- Fire Industry Licensing (fire alarm, extinguisher, sprinkler and fireworks)
- Fire Industry Investigations
- Engineering Assistance (fire alarm and sprinkler plans)
- Fire Safety Inspections
- Public Protection Classification (PPC) Oversight
- Fire Safety House
- School Curriculum Guides
- Texas Fire Incident Reporting System (TEXFIRS)
- **FireLines** newsletter and *Fires In Texas* publications

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# Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program

## *Starting a Local Program*



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# Child Fireplay and Firesetting

A fire is reported every 3½ hours in Texas as a result of children playing with fire, matches, or other fire starter tools. Annually these child-set fires result in more than

- 138 injuries
- 8 deaths
- \$9 million in property loss



## Juvenile Arson

Of all the FBI index crimes (the most serious felonies), arson has one of the highest rates of juvenile involvement. Of those arrested, more than 50 percent are age 17 and under. More than 500 juveniles are arrested for arson annually in Texas. These juveniles are responsible for more than \$6 million in property loss.

## Understanding the Problem

Fire interest in children is almost universal. Children of all ages are involved in firesetting behavior. Although curiosity about fire is natural, setting fires is not. Children who set fires may have one or more of the following characteristics

- have little fire knowledge
- are curious
- are impulsive
- are nonverbal/performance learners

- are mischievous and oppositional
- have learning disabilities
- have been physically or sexually abused
- are anxious and traumatized
- are socially awkward and isolated
- are sad and depressed
- find it hard to communicate with words
- are angry and hostile
- feel rejected and abandoned
- are thrill seeking
- are violent and aggressive
- have a serious mental illness\*

Researchers have identified four general categories of juvenile firesetting behavior.

### Curiosity Firesetters

- generally 3 to 7 years old
- mostly boys (90 percent)
- lack fire safety knowledge
- may be hyperactive and impulsive
- learn by touching, experimenting and manipulating

### Crisis Firesetters

- use fire to express or seek relief from anger, feelings of helplessness, sadness and confusion related to stress or major changes in their life
- are commonly 6 to 12 years old
- will continue to set fires until needs are met
- may set fires that are symbolic of the crisis

### Delinquent Firesetters

- 10 to 17 years of age
- strong peer influence
- often malicious intent
- history of school failure and behavioral problems

### Psychopathological Firesetters

- protective of fires
- severely disturbed
- chronic history of academic or psychic trauma
- fires may have ritualistic and repetitive quality
- set many fires



## Becoming a part of the Solution

Juvenile firesetter intervention programs are successful in reducing firesetting behavior. According to NFPA, without intervention more than 75 percent of youths who have played with or set fire will do it again.

The fire service is often the first to identify youths who have set fires. Fire service personnel are experts in fire safety. That makes the fire service the logical place for an intervention program.

Intervention programs within the fire service

- evaluate juveniles and their families to identify needs and determine risks for future firesetting,
- provide appropriate fire safety education, and
- help juveniles and their families meet other needs (counseling, social services, etc.) by referring them to other resources within the community.

\* From *Drawn To The Flame: Assessment And Treatment of Juvenile Firesetting Behavior*, Robert F. Stadolnik, EdD (2000)