**SWEET SUMMERTIME**

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Youth firesetting prevention and intervention specialist

School’s out!

It’s an exciting time for students — but also the time we experience the most fires set by kids.

Please keep this in mind as summer approaches, especially regarding wildland, dumpster, playground and porta-potty fire calls. Watch for youngsters in the area. Question any kids you see hanging out in the shadows. If these kids are starting fires, they need help immediately, and you can initiate an intervention.

Why go through the process? Arson data indicates that by the time a juvenile is caught starting a fire, s/he has already set ten fires without being caught. Dian Williams, Ph.D. (aka “Dr. Arson”) states that without intervention, young firesetters may continue this behavior and become serial arsonists. That’s destructive to children, families and entire communities.

To begin, find State Fire Marshal Division intervention-processing forms online at [www.fire.state.mn.us/programs](http://www.fire.state.mn.us/programs)/youth firesetting prevention & intervention/forms. They include an on-scene interview guide for investigators/firefighters with questions to ask the child and the family. The form can be modified to accommodate specific FD processes for handling these cases. Many departments keep electronic or hard-copy versions of these forms in their rigs.

Once your paperwork is done and your case is turned over to a local coordinator (or a call is placed to 1-800-500-8897) the process begins. The coordinator will choose a youth-firesetting intervention specialist (YFIS) to conduct an assessment with the family. The YFIS will gather the necessary forms (also available on line), including a participation release or a privacy statement (whichever your YFPI team chooses to use), an intake form, a youth-and-family risk survey and a pre-test for the child. All of the forms are self-explanatory; they help gather information necessary for an effective intervention.

The youth–and–family risk survey form is *very* user-friendly. All the answers for the family and child are in drop-down menus. Each answer is numerically weighted. As you choose from the drop-down answers, the math is done behind the scene, and the appropriate intervention strategy becomes clear.

The intervention strategies typically include a firesetting prevention education piece. Sometimes additional referrals to mental health or juvenile justice programs are also necessary. The fire service is the best resource for the fire education piece, and there will be ideas for these educational sessions online. We have put together grade-appropriate ideas for the fire service to work with. Please remember to educate the child “grade” appropriately; many firesetters we encounter have special needs of some sort, and are not always in the school grade that corresponds to their age.

You will find a basic lesson plan for younger kids, and you can tailor that plan to the child you are working with in one-on-one sessions.

There is a PowerPoint with links to various media on the Internet for older kids. This PowerPoint can be used as an outline for one-on-one education, or it can be used in a classroom setting. We have purchased master rights to several Image Bank DVDs, which will also be available on line.

We have “Keep Away” cards for use in interventions or prevention education. The card game is like a child’s game of “Concentration.” There are many pairs of picture cards, including lighters and matches; if one turns over a lighter or match, it’s a “KEEP AWAY” and they lose a turn, reinforcing the message to keep away from lighters and matches. If you are interested in these materials, they are given away at our YFPI educational sessions, and you can contact our office if you need more.

If you don’t have a local YFPI team in place yet, we can help!

We piloted our YFPI level I & II education in April and we’re now taking training sessions on the road. Each level is a two-day NFA course, and can be modified for a drill night or a local investigation- or YFPI-team meeting — or delivered in its entirety (ideal) at a local conference.

If you need immediate assistance, our deputy will come out and help you get started by assisting with the assessment and the implementation of an intervention strategy.

Remember, too, that other community members can be involved. Schools and social/family services professionals are a great resource for our teams!

Please let us know how we can assist by calling Kathi Osmonson at 651-201-7220 or email kathi.osmonson@state.mn.us.

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