



Coffee Break Training - Fire Prevention and Public Education

Identification of Juveniles Involved in Firesetting

No. FM-2014-7 July 3, 2014

Learning Objective: The student will be able to explain factors to consider during the identification process of juveniles involved in firesetting.

There are multiple ways that juveniles involved in fire incidents come to the attention of a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program, including parents and caregivers; schools; law enforcement, juvenile justices, courts and attorneys; mental health agencies; social and child protective services; and the fire service.

Once the juvenile has been identified, the pathway to intervention depends on a number of factors.

1. **Immediate referral:** Mandates may require immediate referral to the local justice system if there is a violation of local, state or federal law.
2. **The age of the juvenile:** This is known as the age of accountability. Depending upon the state, the age of accountability may vary. Most states place this age between 7 and 9, although it can be as late as 12. Courts have ruled that this is the age when children can understand right from wrong. It is the responsibility of program personnel to ensure that they are familiar with their state's age of accountability.
3. **The nature and severity of the fire:** Those youths who commit firesetting acts that result in large dollar loss and/or loss of life may be referred to the juvenile justice system before any firesetting intervention takes place.
4. **The firesetting history of the juvenile:** Many youth firesetting prevention and intervention programs have strict guidelines on disposition of first-time firesetting versus repeat firesetting.
5. **Standard operating procedures (SOPs) or standard operating guidelines (SOGs):** It is essential that all personnel who have the potential to interact with a youth and his or her family have a basic understanding of SOPs or SOGs of the youth firesetting prevention and intervention program. This is most important when dealing with walk-in requests for services at a fire station. SOPs and SOGs will help ensure that rapid and reliable assistance is provided to all families in need of program services.

For more information about youth firesetting prevention and intervention, consider enrolling in the National Fire Academy's two-day class "Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention — Level 1" (F/W0633) by visiting <http://apps.usfa.fema.gov/nfacourses/catalog/details/10525>.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency. Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention, January 2014.