



## Youth Fire Misuse

- Many youth incorrectly think that they can control the ignition sources they misuse (i.e. lighters, matches, fireworks, explosives, etc.) and the fires they set.
- Many parents believe their children “know better” than to play with fire, when in fact fire misuse by youth remains a serious and widespread problem.
- Even though most fires set by youth are started out of curiosity or experimentation (versus intentional malice), the damage they cause in terms of both economic and human costs is real and devastating.
- Children “playing” with fire is a very dangerous behavior. Each year, children “playing” (intentional fires not included) with fire cause on average of 49,300 fires, 860 injuries and 80 deaths. (NFPA 2014) ☐
- These fires cost \$235 million in property damage each year in the United States. Not included in these astronomical costs are other expensive indirect costs, such as medical care, fire department response, lost wages or business, etc. (NFPA 2014)
- Data extrapolated from fire department records (which include both intentionally-set fires and fire play) show that every year approximately 187,000 reported fires are caused by youth. Even more alarming, due to lack of reporting it is likely that this number under-estimates the actual number of youth-set fires by 300%. (NFPA 2009 - 2011)
- Approximately 40% of the fires that youth set in a home originate in the child’s bedroom. Older children and teenagers are more likely to set fires outside or to other structures. (NFPA 2011)
- About 40% of the fires that kill young children less than 5 years old are started by kids “playing” with fire. (NFPA 2005)
- Fires that youth set to structures cause on average over \$22,600 in damages. (NFPA 2009)
- Youth who misuse fire can be charged with a crime, may be prosecuted as an adult, and can have a permanent criminal record. Children under 18 years old account for nearly 50% of all arson arrests in the United States. (U.S. Department of Justice-FBI, 2000-2011)
- In many states, parents are held legally and financially responsible for their child’s fire misuse.
- There are many reasons why youth misuse fire. It can be attributed to experimentation, curiosity, boredom, or peer-pressure. However, there are times when it is motivated by other things in a child’s life. Fire misuse can be a sign that a child is struggling and needs additional support or help.
- Without appropriate intervention, many youth will continue to set fires throughout their lifetime placing themselves, family, neighbors, classmates, innocent bystanders, other citizens, first responders, and firefighters at high-risk for injury or death.

