

# **Durango Fire and Rescue Authority**

## **Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Handbook**

**For  
School  
Personnel**



# **Durango Fire and Rescue Authority Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program**

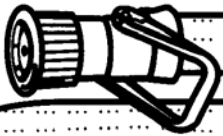


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As stated in the 2006 International Fire Code, Chapter 4 Section 401.3 – **“In the event that an unwanted fire occurs on a property (school), the owner or occupant shall immediately report such condition to the fire department.** Building employees and tenants shall implement the appropriate emergency plans and procedures. No person shall, by verbal or written directive, require any delay in the reporting of a fire to the fire department.”

This means, that **by law**, any fire, ignition or explosion shall be reported, even if the fire was put out by a school employee or by a student.



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# Fire, Kids and Firesetting

Fire - It fascinates and terrifies us. It is critical to our existence. But, uncontrolled, it can cause death, injuries and property destruction.

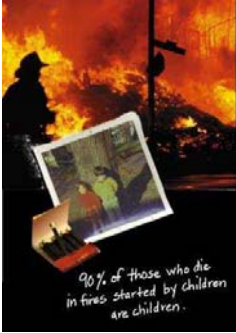
The unsupervised, experimental, mischievous or illegal use of fire by children in the United States has become a major threat to personal safety and property. Recently, juvenile arson arrests have exceeded adult arson arrests for the first time in history. The number of childhood deaths or serious injuries due to firesetting by children is alarming.

## Warning Signs

The following is a list of "red flags" or indicators that a child may have a serious firesetting problem. If a child has set more than one fire or has had more than one incident of fireplay and one or more of the following, you are encouraged to seek professional help.

- 🚒 Recent changes in behavior
- 🚒 Attention deficits, temper tantrums, mood swings, impulsive behavior or excessive anger
- 🚒 Problems at school such as discipline, learning problems or unexplained absences
- 🚒 Other troublesome behaviors such as stealing, lying and drug or alcohol use
- 🚒 Deliberate efforts to collect fire materials
- 🚒 Failed to get help to extinguish a fire
- 🚒 Shows extreme curiosity about fire
- 🚒 Recent losses due to death, health, divorce, loss of friendships, moves, etc.
- 🚒 History of being abused or neglected
- 🚒 Sad, withdrawn appearance
- 🚒 Poor self esteem
- 🚒 Family stresses
- 🚒 Daydreams about fire
- 🚒 Boasts about fire sets
- 🚒 Behaviors indicating they are a loner, a risk taker or a fighter
- 🚒 Fire set out of anger or in response to a family problem

# Categories of Firesetters



## Curiosity

Firesetting occurs in kids who have a natural curiosity about fire, coupled with limited knowledge of the dangers of fire and an opportunity to obtain matches, lighters and accelerants (aerosol cans).



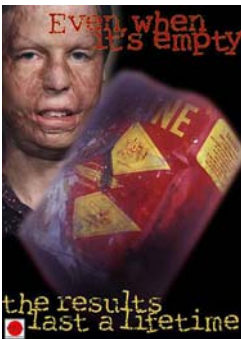
## Crisis

Acting out of an emotional state, anxious or worried, fires intentionally set, attention seeking, control seeking, or a cry for help.



## Thrill Seeker

Usually acts out with peers, sets themselves or friends on fire with accelerants, not looking to damage property, does not recognize serious nature of act, thinks he or she is immortal, mimics acts seen on TV and internet, usually graduates to this from other accelerant and flammable liquid use. This behavior is becoming epidemic.



## Delinquent

Impulsive and irresponsible, school problems, or problems with home life, show offs, bad reputation, argumentative or angry, uncooperative, little or no remorse, doesn't recognize serious consequences.



## Pathological

Very serious and dangerous, "Pyromaniacs", arousal, fascination with fire, magical aspects of fire, hospitalization may be necessary.

*"Burn another day away, singe away the pain. Never take the Zippo from the pyromaniac, it's their only tie to life."*

Quote from a self-proclaimed pyromaniac

# ADD/ADHD and Firesetting

Attention Deficit or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders are a common denominator with many juvenile firesetters. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, ADD/ADHD affects 3-5% of all children in the United States. The National Institute of Mental Health has identified the following three characteristics of ADD/ADHD:

1. **Inattention:** Children may have difficulty focusing on one task for any length of time. They live in the moment and often forget directions or rules given a short time ago. Playing with matches, lighters or candles may result in the child walking away from burning or smoldering objects they have just ignited.
2. **Impulsivity:** Children act quickly without thinking of the possible consequences of their behavior. They tend to act immediately when encountering interesting objects such as matches or lighters. The sense of adventure and excitement is very high in these children and contributes to the high risk of burn injury.
3. **Hyperactivity:** These children may exhibit a high activity or energy level. The high energy level coupled with a strong curiosity can lead to fire experimentation especially when parental supervision is lacking.

A diagnosis of ADD/ADHD requires a trained clinician with expertise in childhood disorders to thoroughly test and evaluate the child. The clinician, parent and teacher should develop intervention and treatment plans to afford this child the most opportunity for success. Monitoring and reevaluation should be on a continuous basis.

Children rely on parents and caregivers for nurturing, security, acceptance and stability. When conflicts, distress, substance abuse, instability or death occur in the home children become unsettled, scared, angry, depressed or sad and attempt to resolve the issues in their own mind without having learned appropriate coping or problem solving skills. One way children attempt to cope and express their emotions is by setting a fire. The child's firesetting places the family and neighborhood in extreme danger.



# School Fire Information and Mandatory Reporting

As stated in the 2006 International Fire Code, Chapter 4 Section 401.3 – **“In the event that an unwanted fire occurs on a property (school), the owner or occupant shall immediately report such condition to the fire department.** Building employees and tenants shall implement the appropriate emergency plans and procedures. No person shall, by verbal or written directive, require any delay in the reporting of a fire to the fire department.”

This means, that **by law**, any fire, ignition or explosion shall be **reported, even if the fire was put out by a school employee or by a student.**

School fires include the following:

- Using matches and lighters, a heated light bulb or magnifying glass to light combustibles on fire in the school bathroom, hallways, locker-room, classroom or playground.
- Lighting firecrackers, smoke bombs or other firework type devices on school property
- Lighting paper or other products on fire in a trashcan, dumpster or near a school campus
- Lighting warming fires at a school bus stop
- Using chemicals to cause a fire in a science classroom or on other school property
- Using a spray can such as hairspray, deodorant, cologne or perfume and a lighter to make a torch on or near school property or on a school bus
- Flicking lit matches
- Making, possessing, and/or activating any kind of bomb-like device on or near a school campus
- Setting bushes, trees, brush or grass on fire on or near a school campus

# The Crime of Arson

The law in the state of Colorado is very specific as it relates to fireworks, reckless burning and arson, regardless of where the offense occurs. One thought to consider is that a child can be arrested in Colorado at the age of ten for setting a fire even if he/she did not mean for the fire to damage anything or get out of control. **Intent is not a prerequisite** to the crime of arson. Colorado has four “degrees” of arson, a statute dealing with woods and prairies, and a municipal code for illegal fireworks. Children ten years of age or older can be arrested for any one of these statutes.

## **Arson in the First Degree – 18 - 4 - 102:**

This crime involves the burning of a building or occupied structure.

First degree arson is proved by showing beyond a reasonable doubt that the offender knowingly set fire to, burned, or caused to be burned any building or occupied structure of another without owner’s consent. First degree arson is a class 3 felony.

## **Arson in the Second Degree – 18 - 4 - 103:**

This crime involves the burning of any “property” (other than a building or occupied structure) of another.

Second degree arson is proved by showing beyond a reasonable doubt that the offender knowingly set fire to, burned, or caused to be burned any property (not a building or occupied structure) of another without that person’s consent. Second degree arson is a class 4 felony if the damage is \$100.00 or more, or a class 2 misdemeanor if the damage is less than \$100.00.

## **Arson in the Third Degree – 18 – 4 - 104:**

This crime involves the burning of property with the intent to defraud.

Third degree arson is proved by showing beyond a reasonable doubt that the offender by means of fire or explosives intentionally damaged any property with the intent to defraud. Third degree arson is a class 4 felony.

## **Arson in the Fourth Degree – 18 - 4 - 105:**

This crime involves the reckless starting of a fire or causing an explosion. The penalty depends upon whether the act endangers persons or property.

Fourth degree arson is proved by showing beyond a reasonable doubt that the offender knowingly or recklessly starts or maintains a fire or causes an explosion on his own property or that of another and places another person in danger of death or serious bodily injury, or any building or occupied structure of another in danger of damage. Fourth degree arson is a class 4 felony if a person is endangered, a class 2 misdemeanor if only property worth more than \$100.00 is endangered, or a class 3 misdemeanor if only property worth less than \$100.00 is endangered.

## **Firing Woods and Prairie – 18 – 13 – 109:**

On property of another the offender knowingly and without lawful authority or with criminal negligence set on fire/caused to be set on fire, any woods/prairie/grounds of other description other than his own. Spreading to property of another the offender knowingly or with criminal negligence set a fire/caused a fire to be set, and permitted that fire to pass from his own grounds to the injury of any other person. Firing Woods and Prairie is a class 2 misdemeanor.

## **Fireworks:**

The City of Durango code reads as follows:

- It shall be unlawful for any person to have any fireworks in his possession. (Section 8-2)

# What to do if a Child Brings Matches or Lighters to School or Sets a Fire at School

- 🚒 Follow state laws and school policy and procedure regarding school fires and the possession of matches and lighters on school grounds
- 🚒 Do not just chalk it up to kids being kids, this child may be sending a message that he/she needs help
- 🚒 As part of your school discipline policy, incorporate mandatory attendance in a juvenile firesetter intervention program offered by the Durango Fire and Rescue Authority or your local fire department
- 🚒 If your school has counselors or social workers, notify the counselor or social worker of the firesetting incident and have him/her work with the child to find out why the child set the fire
- 🚒 Notify your local Durango Fire and Rescue of the fire incident, even if the fire was small and was put out by school personnel. This child is in need of assistance.
- 🚒 Notify the child's parent or guardian of the incident and of the referral to the Durango Fire and Rescue Authority's Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program.

## How to Make a Referral

- Step I:** If the fire has not been completely extinguished call 9-1-1 immediately.
- Step II:** Contact the child's parent/guardian and have them respond to the school to meet with school administrators and possibly a fire investigator. If your school has an SRO, they should be contacted also.
- Step III:** Contact the Durango Fire and Rescue Authority or your local fire department as soon after the fire incident as possible.
- 📍 Durango Fire Rescue Authority Arson Investigations: 970-382-6029
  - 📍 Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program: 970-382-6014
- Have the child's biographical information available including child's name, parent/guardian name, address and telephone number, child's age and date of birth. Please be able to provide information on the fire including the type of ignition source, location of fire, amount of damage done and if there were any injuries.

**The Juvenile Firesetter Referral Form used by  
Durango Fire and Rescue Authority is available for download at  
[www.durangofirerescue.org](http://www.durangofirerescue.org)**