

# July 4<sup>th</sup> Holiday Sparks Youth Fire Problems

*Independence Day teaches more about playing with fire than U.S. history.*

Historically, the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday is the gateway to youth-set fires all summer long. July and August usually show the highest level of youth firesetting activity.

Fireworks aren't the problem though. Most often, the message that fireworks carry (because of the way adults treat and use them) is the underlying problem. Because the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday revolves around a celebration that demonstrates igniting items that burn, spark, smoke, and explode, children are left with the impression that this fun activity might be something they would like to try. After all, look at all the fun the family had!

Children learn most readily by watching the adults around them (this is not limited to young children). If that adult behavior, such as lighting fireworks, does not emphasize the dangers of fireworks, children cannot be expected to see fireworks as dangerous devices. All the words of warning will not overcome the role modeling of adults.

Empowerment of children who have been given the opportunity to use fire to light fireworks (or for other uses) empowers them to try it again, sometimes without the proper supervision. This leads to many unintended fires and related consequences that include damage, trauma, and sometimes death.

Firework injuries are a problem of themselves. The following national statistics reveal:

- Of the more than 4,000 fireworks-related injuries to children under 14 each year, the majority occur in the month surrounding the July 4th holiday, with 10 to 14 year olds suffering the most injuries. Sparklers (often considered the safest fireworks), rockets and firecrackers are responsible for the bulk of fireworks-related injuries. (source - [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org))
- An estimated 23,200 fireworks fires in 2002 caused approximately \$35 million in property loss and almost 60 percent of those fires occur during the month of July around the Independence Day holiday, according to a new report from the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Children under age 15 suffered 45 percent of the 9,300 injuries from fireworks. Firecrackers, sparklers and bottle rockets are the leading contributors to these injuries. (source - [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov))

Fortunately, this is a reversible problem, but it takes effort and attention by adults and caregivers to pass along the right messages to kids, both in words and actions. The tips below can help guide parents to a safer summer.

- Keep matches and lighters high and out of reach of children

- Set an example of safety when lighting candles, fireplaces, campfires, and barbecues (children learn from the adults around them through **watching**, rather than **listening**)
- Explain to children what is expected of them rather than criticize their actions when they make a mistake. Often it's too late after the mistake is made
- Help children recognize matches and lighters as a dangerous tool, rather than a toy. They have usually been exposed to other dangerous items (knives, loaded guns, power tools, etc.) in the house and can understand this distinction well.
- Intervention - Don't ignore the obvious. When kids use fire in ways that are not approved by adults, problems can occur. Whether for education or an in-depth evaluation, seek the appropriate help before serious problems occur.
- Find Help - The local fire department is often the best point of first contact when you need help with a child who is misusing fire. SOS FIRES can also help. Find resources around the globe on the SOS FIRES web site "Find-A-Program" page ([www.sosfires.com](http://www.sosfires.com)).

Safety should never take a holiday. Help keep children and the community safe by taking fire seriously this summer, and all year long.