

"Child's Play" Kills North Portland Child

Investigators determine that a small child "playing" with a barbecue lighter ignited the deadly blaze.

In the second fatal fire incident in the last month, children playing with barbecue lighters have now taken 4 lives.

The deadly blaze that occurred last month in Bellingham, Washington took 3 lives when a 10-year old youth, playing with a barbecue lighter, ignited a creek full of gasoline. He, his friend, and an 18-year old that was fishing nearby were all killed in the fire.

More recently, on July 6th, a six-month-old child died when either his three or six-year-old sibling used a barbecue style lighter to ignite the family home.

While children setting fires is sometimes viewed as being a harmless activity that all kids do, it is clearly deadly. Yet matches and lighters are frequently left within reach of young children, particularly during the summer when things like barbecues, campfires, and fireworks become more common household events.

Kids often imitate the actions of the adults around them. Fire is no different. Adults must be vigilant with the message they give children about fire, whether through words or actions.

Children have a natural curiosity about fire, which turns deadly about 400 times each year in the United States. Parents sometimes fail to intervene quickly enough. The presumption is often made that "kids will be kids," or "...it's just a phase," or even "it's okay, I did that when I was young." These assumptions doom America's children to cause about \$280 million in property loss, and almost 3,000 injuries each year (according to the National Fire Protection Association). But virtually every incident is preventable. And the people best situated to prevent firesetting behavior are parents.

Solutions to the child fireplay problem include the following:

- 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 (as in the above example) it's too late after the mistake is made
- 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. If that doesn't work, contact SOS FIRES. We have a national network of professionals who can help find local

resources to meet your needs. See the SOS FIRES web site at sosfires.com or call us at (503) 805-8482.

The two most common features in every child-set fire are access to matches/lighters and supervision that is inappropriate for the child. Please be vigilant of these factors so children can remain safe.