

"Child's Play" Kills Three in Bellingham, Washington

Investigators say a 10-year-old with a barbecue lighter set the deadly blaze.

As summer approaches, so do outdoor activities involving fire, like barbecuing and campfires. Unfortunately, the recent incident in Bellingham, Washington, in which three youths were killed after a leaking gasoline line filled a creek, provides a grim reminder of a key danger fire presents in our society.

Investigators have reported that the deadly fire was lit by a 10-year-old boy who was "playing" with a barbecue lighter. The boy was one of the three who died.

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.