



NEWS from **DHSES**

NEW YORK STATE
DIVISION OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND EMERGENCY SERVICES
1220 Washington Avenue, Building 7A, Suite 710, Albany, NY 12226

Governor Cuomo Proclaims May 6-12, 2012 as Arson Awareness Week in New York State

Issued By: NYS - Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Services

Issued On: 04/30/12 11:01 AM

Affected Jurisdictions: New York

Category / Publication: Press Release - General

Governor Cuomo today proclaimed May 6-12, 2012 as Arson Awareness Week in New York State. "This year's theme – 'Prevent Youth Firesetting' – focuses on fires set by children," said Governor Cuomo. "All too often, children are also the victims of these fires. It is important to understand the motives and myths surrounding youth firesetting, and to work to prevent this type of destructive behavior."

Youth firesetting is the fastest growing fire threat in the United States. Each year across the United States, fires set by children are responsible for more than 100 fire deaths, nearly 1,000 painful burn injuries, and hundreds of millions of dollars in property loss, according to the U.S. Fire Administration.

To promote this year's Arson Awareness campaign, the New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control (OFPC) is joining the efforts of the United States Fire Administration (USFA), the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the International Association of Arson Investigators, Safe Kids USA, USAonWatch, and the National Volunteer Fire Council.

"This campaign also addresses the importance of providing the State's fire service, law enforcement, and our allied safety organization with the tools and tactics they need to prevent arson in our communities," Governor Cuomo added.

New York State Fire Administrator Bryant D. Stevens said, "In New York State, approximately 4,000 arson fires are reported by fire departments each year, with almost \$75 million dollars reported in estimated property loss. These figures do not include approximately 10,000 fires that are reported as either 'under investigation' or 'of undetermined cause.' They also do not take into account other, indirect costs such as medical care, funeral expenses, temporary shelter, business interruption, demolition, fire investigation, prosecution, court proceedings and incarceration. Simply put, arson has a significant impact on all New Yorkers."

More than 50% of arson arrests in the United States are juveniles, and 70% of all fatalities in child-set fires are children aged five and under. Annual statistics show that child-set fires result in approximately 67,500 fires, 230 deaths, 1,800 injuries, and \$235 million in property damage.

Several cases involving youth firesetting in New York State include:

- In Monroe County, a two-year-old playing with matches started a fire that took his life and the lives of five family members.
- In Erie County, two youths, nine and twelve years old, used a lighter and hairspray to create a torch. The flame ignited the contents of a playroom and significantly damaged their home.
- In Schenectady County, a two-year-old girl died from injuries sustained in a fire that her sibling set by lighting a cardboard box ablaze on the stove. Their grandmother later died from health problems attributed to the incident.
- In Schoharie County, the discovery of a small bathroom fire uncovered a year-long history of juvenile fire setting; a 13-year-old was identified as setting an estimated 50 to 60 fires.
- In Montgomery County, two boys, 13 and 15 years old, broke into a vacant building and used a lighter to set books inside a barrel on fire. The ensuing fire destroyed three buildings, damaged six others, and displaced 50 people.

Paul D Martin, Chief of OFPC's Inspections and Investigations Branch said, "Unfortunately, many of these types of fires may go unreported or families may underestimate the seriousness of the activity, choosing to hide or ignore such behavior. However, there are programs at local, county, and state levels to assess youth firesetting behavior that can provide appropriate clinical and cognitive assistance."

Many communities currently maintain a specialized Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program, comprised of specially trained personnel from various disciplines such as fire, police prosecutor, educators, counselors and more to ensure that children receive appropriate counseling and education to address firesetting behavior.

From May 21-26, OFPC will host a Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Seminar and Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialist 1 class at the NYS Academy of Fire Science in Montour Falls.

To report an incident of juvenile fire-setting or to find a program in your community, call the New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control at (518) 474-6746. For more information, visit the Office of Fire Prevention and Control website at: www.dhses.ny.gov/ofpc/resources/juvfire.cfm.