



Information Bulletin

Fire Department Response Guidance Document – Chromebook Social Media Trend

DHSES – Office of Fire Prevention and Control (OFPC) has become aware of a potentially dangerous social media trend known as the “Chromebook Trend” or “Chromebook Challenge” that encourages students to insert graphite pencil lead or other metal items like paperclips, pushpins, aluminum foil and mechanical pencils into the USB port of their Chromebook forcing an electrical short circuit.

Hazard:

This action can result in the failure of the lithium-ion battery in the device, posing a serious fire risk and the production of large quantities of toxic and flammable vapor.

According to fire officials, as well as media reports, several schools in New York and surrounding states have had these incidents occur in the recent weeks. In some cases, there have been reports of students trying several times to get devices to react without success. Public safety agencies and schools should be concerned that the batteries in these “failed attempt” devices may become unstable later and pose a serious risk of a runaway thermal event and/or fire.

Response:

Fire Departments responding to calls for these incidents should:

1. Respond to the event as you would any other fire.
2. Evacuate the building or vehicle of staff and students.
3. Wear full PPE including SCBA – smoke from lithium batteries is especially toxic.
4. Extinguish any remaining fire.
5. Ventilate the building or vehicle.
6. Monitor the air – Some toxic bi-products may not be measurable with a standard 4-gas meter.
7. Remove any power to the device.
8. If a run-away reaction of the device has occurred, don't assume that reaction is over, additional reactions are possible. Do not handle the device unnecessarily.
9. Consider calling your local hazmat team.
10. Overpack the device, while wearing complete firefighter PPE (including SCBA), in an appropriate drum with appropriate overpacking materials. – Do not handle the device unnecessarily.
11. Remove the overpacked container from the building
12. Contact and environmental cleanup contractor (call2recycle.org)
13. Notify Law Enforcement – this incident can be considered a criminal in nature.
14. Notify OFPC of the incident by sending an email to batteryemergencies@dhses.ny.gov

OFPC is available for Technical Assistance regarding these incidents and can be reached at 518-474-6746.