



**FEMA**

N0629

Dear National Fire Academy Student:

Congratulations on being selected to attend the U.S. Fire Administration's (USFA's)/National Fire Academy's (NFA's) "Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention" (YFPI) course.

The purpose of the course is to provide you with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify children and adolescents involved in firesetting and how to establish programs to meet their needs. The course framework guides you through the process of developing a comprehensive strategy to combat the misuse of fire and incendiary devices by youths.

Enclosed is a pre-course assignment, which is a prerequisite for attending this course. You are to bring the completed assignment with you to class.

This class is a six day class with evening classes possible. Check with your host site for the schedule.

The Student Manual (SM) for this course is now available in a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) format which will function on any electronic device. Please see the page following this letter for complete instructions on successfully downloading your SM. Please note: If you plan to bring/use an iPad, you may experience issues saving/storing/printing course assignments since there is no USB/thumb drive capacity for these devices.

If you need additional information related to your course's content or requirements, please contact Mr. Michael Weller, Fire Prevention Management Curriculum Training Specialist, at (301) 447-1476, or by email at [michael.weller@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:michael.weller@fema.dhs.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tonya L. Hoover".

Tonya L. Hoover, Superintendent  
National Fire Academy  
U.S. Fire Administration

Enclosures

## **National Fire Academy Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Course Materials/Download Instructions**

If you own an electronic device (laptop computer, tablet, etc.) and are familiar with its document reader functions, we are asking you to download the Student Manual (SM) before you travel to class and bring the preloaded device with you.

The **first step** is to download ADOBE Reader to your device. This will enable you to read and manipulate the course materials. ADOBE Reader can be used to comment and highlight text in Portable Document Format (PDF) documents. It is an excellent tool for note-taking purposes.

### **For Laptops and Computers**

ADOBE Reader can be downloaded from [www.adobe.com/downloads/](http://www.adobe.com/downloads/). It is a free download. Please note that depending on your settings, you may have to temporarily disable your antivirus software.

### **For Tablets and Other Similar Hand-Held Devices**

ADOBE Reader can be downloaded onto devices such as iPads, android tablets, and other hand-held devices. ADOBE Reader for these types of devices can be found in the device's Application Store using the search function and typing in "ADOBE Reader." Follow the instructions given. **It is a free application.** Note: In order to have the editing capabilities/toolbar, the document needs to be "opened with ADOBE Reader." There should be a function on your device to do this.

After you have successfully downloaded the ADOBE Reader, please use the following Web link to download your N0629, "Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention" (YFPI) SM. (You may copy/paste this link into your Web browser.)

[https://nfa.usfa.fema.gov/ax/sm/sm\\_n0629.pdf](https://nfa.usfa.fema.gov/ax/sm/sm_n0629.pdf)

Note: Please make sure you download the ADOBE Reader first. To open the SM, you will need to open the ADOBE Reader and then open the SM through the ADOBE Reader in order for the note-taking tools to work properly.

If you need assistance, please contact [nfaonlinetier2@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:nfaonlinetier2@fema.dhs.gov).

***YOUTH FIRESETTING PREVENTION  
AND INTERVENTION (N0629)  
PRE-COURSE ASSIGNMENT***

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Welcome to the National Fire Academy's (NFA's) *Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention* (YFPI) course. This six-day course will give you the knowledge, skills and abilities to perform many of the job performance requirements as outlined in National Fire Protection Association 1035, *Standard on Fire and Life Safety Educator, Public Information Officer, Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist and Youth Firesetter Program Manager Professional Qualifications*.

Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist practitioners provide services at the program delivery level. They help identify children involved in firesetting, conduct program intakes, provide screenings to identify risks of future firesetting, deliver educational intervention, perform followups, and evaluate program services.

Youth Firesetter Program Manager leaders help develop, implement, lead and evaluate a YFPI program. In addition, the program leader must be proficient in **all** of the skills required for a Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist.

The target audience for this course is anyone who will perform leadership duties within a YFPI program. Leaders can be volunteer and career firefighters, fire investigators, fire and life safety educators, and allied professionals from criminal justice, mental health, social services, and juvenile justice.

Whether or not your community currently has a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program, an important prerequisite before you attend this course is to explore the past history, current experience, and projected future impact of youth firesetting at the local level. Investing the time to do this task will prepare you for a successful class experience. You will continue to use this information after your departure from NFA, most specifically, as you process the YFPI culminating assignment that calls for producing a plan to create a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program in your community.

Units 2 and 3 are included in the pre-course assignment to allow you time to read these units and become familiar with the material before class. You are encouraged to bring a laptop or other electronic device that will allow you to process class activities.

To achieve the optimal benefits of the course, we ask that you perform research in advance of the course. Please come prepared to use the following information pertinent to your community and organization:

- Is your community urban, suburban, rural or a mixture?

- How many youth firesetting incidents does your organization handle per year?
  
  - What types of youth firesetting incidents do you handle most frequently?
  
  - Are there areas of your community where incidents of youth firesetting occur more frequently? If so, where?
  
  - Are there particular age groups that represent a greater problem than others? If so, please identify them.
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- Who are the people from your organization who are (or should be) involved with the components of the YFPI program, such as:
  - Identification of youth in need of services.
  - Intake of youth/families.
  - Screening process.
  - Educational interventions.
  - Follow-up to program services.
  - Program evaluation.
  
- Please bring a copy of your organization's overall mission statement.

Lastly, sign up for Fire is Everyone's Fight™. This national effort is led by the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) to lower the number of home fires and home fire injuries in America. Along with USFA and partner organizations across the country, the fire community is speaking out with a unified message of fire prevention and safety to the public. The goal is to change how people think about fire and fire prevention, using social marketing strategies to address the broadest audience.

Go to <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/prevention/outreach/fief/>. Scroll down a couple lines, and click on Fire is Everyone's Fight. Continue scrolling down the page until you see the box on the right to register as a partner to use the Fire is Everyone's Fight logo on materials you create. The Fire is Everyone's Fight logo is trademarked, so we require that you complete a simple registration form to use it. Once you register, you'll have access to various versions of the logo optimized for website, print and online materials.

You are encouraged to download the Fire is Everyone's Fight Guide at: [https://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/fief/fief\\_outreach\\_guide.pdf](https://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/fief/fief_outreach_guide.pdf). This will help you develop creative ways to engage your community.

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## **UNIT 2: NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION STANDARD 1035**

### **LEARNING OUTCOME**

*Upon completion of this unit, the students will be able to compare and contrast the competencies necessary to meet Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist and Youth Firesetter Program Manager of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1035, Standard on Fire and Life Safety Educator, Public Information Officer, Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist and Youth Firesetter Program Manager Professional Qualifications, 2015 edition.*

### **ENABLING OBJECTIVES**

*The students will:*

- 1. Explain the history and purpose of NFPA 1035.*
  - 2. Analyze the knowledge and skills expected of a Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist who meets the criteria specified as part of NFPA 1035.*
  - 3. Analyze the knowledge and skills expected of a Youth Firesetter Program Manager who meets the criteria specified as part of NFPA 1035.*
  - 4. Explain why some jurisdictions require Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialists to meet the Job Performance Requirements (JPRs) of a Level I Fire and Life Safety Educator (FLSE).*
  - 5. Explain the importance of following prescribed procedures in administering a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program.*
  - 6. Describe recommended components of a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program based on NFPA 1035.*
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## INTRODUCTION

This unit focuses entirely on National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1035, *Standard on Fire and Life Safety Educator, Public Information Officer, Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist and Youth Firesetter Program Manager Professional Qualifications*, 2015 edition.

Meeting an NFPA standard not only benefits a person individually through attainment of higher education/skill abilities, it also enhances the credibility and effectiveness of your organization. Most importantly, it helps improve the levels of service delivered to your community.

The local Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) is responsible for developing the process to certify that a person has successfully met the NFPA standard. Many of the National Fire Academy (NFA) courses provide students with many skills and abilities to prepare for meeting NFPA standards according to local AHJ protocol. *Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention* (YFPI) provides a compilation of material pertinent to youth firesetting.

## OBJECTIVES

### Learning Outcome

Upon completion of this unit, the students will be able to compare and contrast the competencies necessary to meet Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist and Youth Firesetter Program Manager of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1035, *Standard on Fire and Life Safety Educator, Public Information Officer, Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist and Youth Firesetter Program Manager Professional Qualifications*, 2015 edition.

### Enabling Objectives

The students will:

1. Explain the history and purpose of NFPA 1035.
2. Analyze the knowledge and skills expected of a Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist who meets the criteria specified as part of NFPA 1035.
3. Analyze the knowledge and skills expected of a Youth Firesetter Program Manager who meets the criteria specified as part of NFPA 1035.
4. Explain why some jurisdictions require Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialists to meet the Job Performance Requirements (JPRs) of a Level I Fire and Life Safety Educator (FLSE).
5. Explain the importance of following prescribed procedures in administrating a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program.

6. Describe recommended components of a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program based on NFPA 1035.

## HISTORY OF NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION STANDARD 1035

The NFPA creates and maintains minimum standards and requirements for fire prevention/suppression activities, training, equipment, and life safety codes and standards.

The NFPA was formed in 1896 by a group of insurance firm representatives in an effort to standardize fire sprinkler systems. Their influence grew from sprinklers to include buildings' electrical systems and expanded to all aspects of building design and construction. They oversee the development and maintenance of over 300 codes and standards. A cadre of over 6,000 volunteers representing the fire service, insurance, business, industry, government, and consumers develops these documents.

Many State, local, and national governments incorporate NFPA standards and codes which they develop into their own law either verbatim or with only minor modifications. Even when not written into law, the NFPA's standards and codes are typically accepted as a professional standard and are recognized by many courts as such. This widespread acceptance is a testament to the broad representation and input received on all the NFPA's projects.

In 1972, the Joint Council of National Fire Service Organizations (JCNFSO) created the National Professional Qualifications Board for the Fire Service (NPQB) to facilitate the development of nationally applicable performance standards for uniformed fire service personnel.

In 1977, the first edition of NFPA 1031, *Professional Qualifications for Fire Inspector, Fire Investigator, and Fire Prevention Education Officer* was adopted by the NFPA.

In 1986, the Joint Council directed the committee to develop separate documents for each of the job functions the original document addressed. This direction was coupled with the decision to remove the job of Fire Safety Educator from the strict career path previously followed and allow for civilian entry.

The first edition of NFPA 1035, was adopted by the NFPA in June of 1987.

The Technical Committee on Fire Educator Professional Qualifications was established by the NFPA Standards Council in 1990. This committee met numerous times to complete a job task analysis and develop specific JPRs for the job of FLSE.

JPRs describe the knowledge, skills, and abilities that a person meeting the standard should be able to demonstrate. The intent of the Technical Committee was to develop clear and concise JPRs that can be used to determine that an individual, when measured to the standard, possesses the skills and knowledge to perform as a FLSE. These JPRs are applicable to FLSE, both public and private. The **2000 edition of the standard** added new chapters outlining the JPRs for the

following positions: Public Information Officer (PIO), Juvenile Firesetting Intervention Specialist I and II.

The 2005 edition included changes to bring the standard into conformance with the "Manual of Style for NFPA Technical Committee Documents." The chapters on Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialist were revised by a task group to reflect current practice within the field.

The 2010 edition changed the name of the document to include all of the areas of specialization that the document addresses with the requirements. A job/task analysis was conducted to ensure all requirements are related to the level at which one can qualify.

In addition to being revised to meet current needs, the 2015 edition continues to ensure each position is relevant and consistent with trends for the community.

The NFA is **not** a certifying agency for NFPA; however, many of its courses provide students with many skills and abilities to prepare for meeting NFPA standards according to local AHJ protocol.

*Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention (YFPI)* provides a compilation of material pertinent to youth firesetting.

The local AHJ is responsible for developing the process to certify that a person has successfully met an NFPA standard.

The local process is often led/facilitated by a State training agency or local/regional fire academy.

## **COMPARING YOUTH FIRESETTER INTERVENTION SPECIALIST AND YOUTH FIRESETTER PROGRAM MANAGER**

### **Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist**

The Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist is a **practitioner** who provides services at the program delivery level. He or she may help identify firesetters, conduct intakes, provide screenings, deliver educational interventions, perform followups, and evaluate program services/results.

The following graphic provides an overview of duties performed by a Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist practitioner.



### Youth Firesetter Program Manager

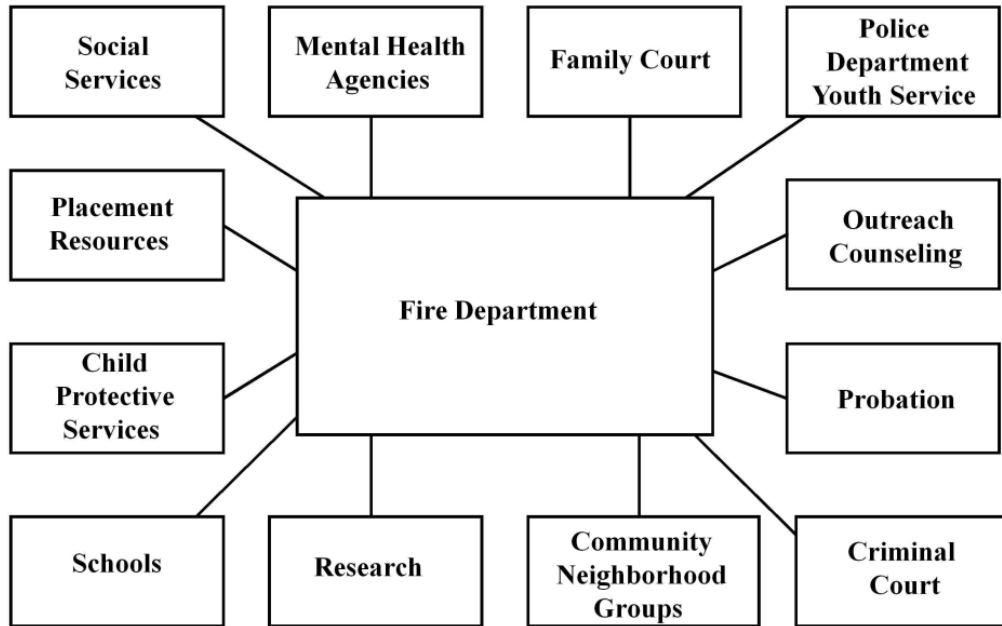
The Youth Firesetter Program Manager must be proficient in **all** duties expected of a Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist practitioner. In addition, he or she needs the skills to **develop, implement, lead, and evaluate** a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program.

The following graphic provides an overview of duties performed by a Youth Firesetter Program Manager.



The most successful approach to preventing/mitigating youth firesetting is through use of a broad-based comprehensive strategy that involves multiple agencies and the community. Logical members of a partnership include (but are not limited to) those that appear in the following graphic:

**Youth Firesetting Prevention/Intervention Task Force**



**Standard Operating Procedures/Standard Operating Guidelines**

It is highly recommended that all youth firesetting prevention and intervention programs have established standard operating procedures (SOPs)/standard operating guidelines (SOGs). SOPs/SOGs define what the program is to do, actions to be taken, by whom, when, where, how, why, and to what degree. SOPs/SOGs help ensure that the program offers services that are safe, ethical, legal, and comply with the local AHJ. **All** practitioners must have mastery understanding of their youth firesetting prevention and intervention program SOPs/SOGs.

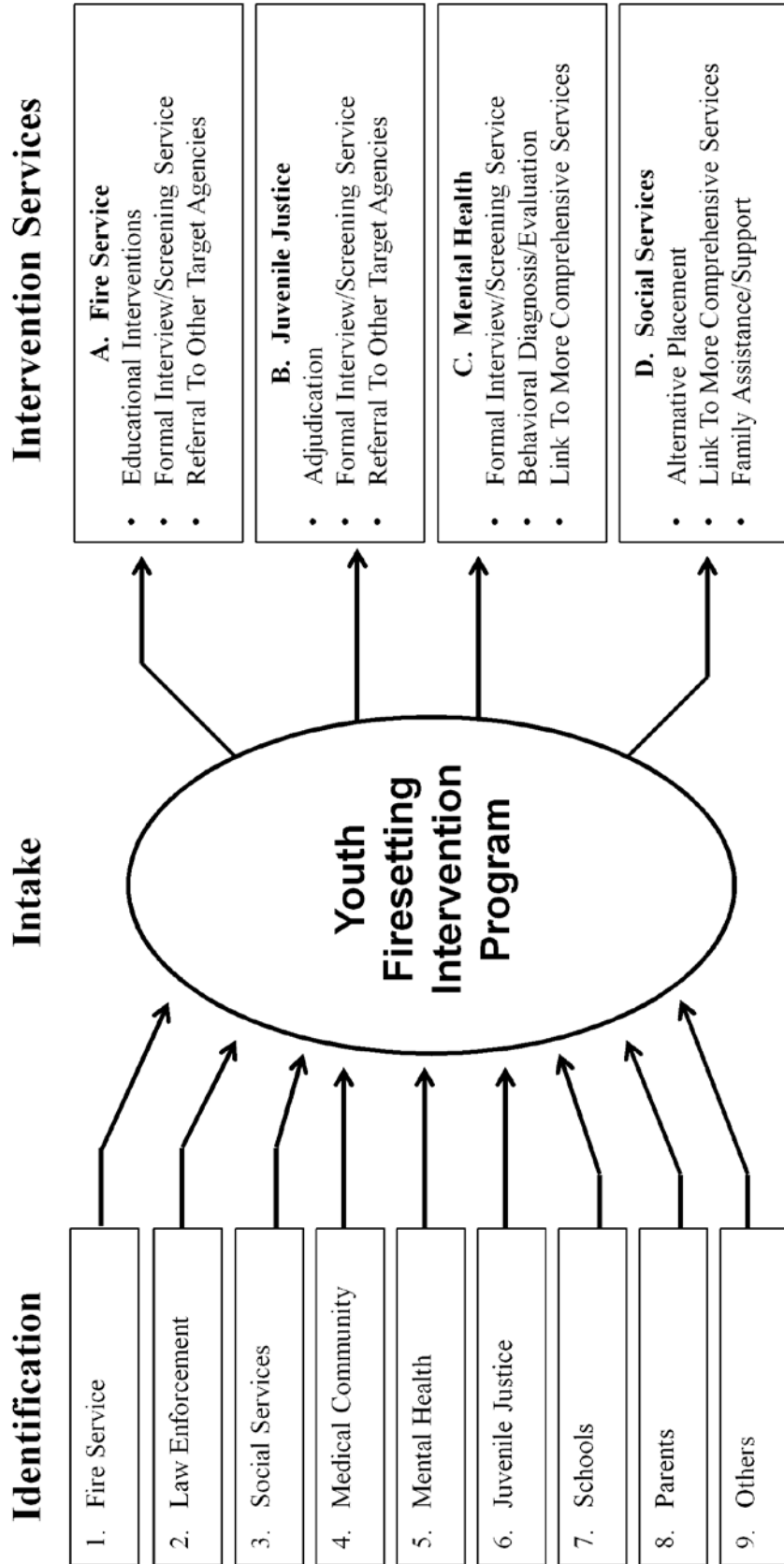
Because the YFPI course generally follows the structure of NFPA 1035, information on how to develop, implement, and lead a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program will be presented **after** the units on how to prevent, identify, intake, screen, and intervene in youth firesetting behaviors.

A flowchart for youth firesetting intervention services appears as an example on the following page.

Unit 8: Program Development will provide indepth information on the recommended components of a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program based on NFPA 1035.



# FLOWCHART FOR YOUTH FIRESETTING INTERVENTION SERVICES



## SUMMARY

- History and purpose of NFPA 1035.
- Knowledge and skills expected of a Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist who meets the criteria specified as part of NFPA 1035.
- Knowledge and skills expected of a Youth Firesetter Program Manager who meets the criteria specified as part of NFPA 1035.
- Rationale of why some jurisdictions may require Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialists to meet the JPRs of a Level I FLSE.
- Importance of following prescribed procedures in administrating a youth firesetting prevention and intervention program.
- Recommended components of a youth firesetting intervention and prevention program based on NFPA 1035.

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## REFERENCE

National Fire Protection Association. *Standard on Fire and Life Safety Educator, Public Information Officer, Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist and Youth Firesetter Program Manager Professional Qualifications*. (2015).

## **UNIT 3: THE EXTENT OF THE YOUTH FIRESETTING PROBLEM**

### **LEARNING OUTCOME**

*Upon completion of this unit, the students will be able to analyze national trends in youth firesetting and compare those trends to the statistics from their home communities.*

### **ENABLING OBJECTIVES**

*The students will:*

- 1. Illustrate the national trends regarding youth firesetting.*
  - 2. Identify the national statistics associated with youth-set school fires.*
  - 3. Evaluate the data gathered on the youth firesetting problem.*
  - 4. Discuss who is setting fires in their community.*
  - 5. Discuss the kinds of fires set by youth.*
  - 6. Estimate the costs associated with youth-set fires.*
  - 7. Relate how youths are experimenting with explosive and pressure-creating devices.*
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## INTRODUCTION

Youth firesetting is a costly and often deadly problem. This unit explores the extent of this problem at the national, state and local level. It helps you understand youth firesetting trends and evaluate how the problem is affecting your community.

## OBJECTIVES

### Learning Outcome

Upon completion of this unit, the students will be able to analyze national trends in youth firesetting and compare those trends to the statistics from their home communities.

### Enabling Objectives

The students will:

1. Illustrate the national trends regarding youth firesetting.
2. Identify the national statistics associated with youth-set school fires.
3. Evaluate the data gathered on the youth firesetting problem.
4. Discuss who is setting fires in their community.
5. Discuss the kinds of fires set by youth.
6. Estimate the costs associated with youth-set fires.
7. Relate how youths are experimenting with explosive and pressure-creating devices.

## THE EXTENT OF THE YOUTH FIRESETTING PROBLEM

### Youth Firesetting Facts

#### The Costs

Whether the youth was misusing, experimenting, or purposely setting a fire, youth firesetting can be costly. The costs associated with youth firesetting include injuries, deaths, property damage, and criminal sanctions.

Fires reported by U.S. fire departments show that during the period of 2004 to 2008, youth playing with fire started 57,700 fires causing an estimated 113 civilian deaths, 916 civilian injuries, and \$286 million in direct property damage. (National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), 2010.)

During 2004 to 2008, an estimated 7,900 **home structure** fires involving **youth fireplay** were reported to U.S. municipal fire departments resulting in an estimated 104 civilian deaths, 775 civilian injuries, and \$197 million in property damage. (Hall, 2010.)

Between 2007 and 2011, an average of 49,300 fires involving playing with fire were reported to U.S. municipal fire departments per year. (Campbell, 2014.) Between 2007 and 2011, these fires caused annual averages of 80 civilian fire deaths, 860 civilian injuries, and \$235 million in property loss. (Campbell, 2014.)

### Child-Play Home Structure Fires

While the majority of fireplay fires (77 percent) started outside, most associated deaths (92 percent) were in home structure fires. (Hall, 2010.) Most home fires involving lighters or matches are started by children. From 2004 to 2008, lighters and matches accounted for 65 percent of child-play home structure fires, 80 percent of associated civilian deaths, and 81 percent of associated civilian injuries. (Flynn/Hall, 2009/2010.)

Forty-seven percent of people who start home structure fires by playing (where age is a factor) were 5 years old or younger. (Hall, 2010.) Children under age 5 are more than eight times as likely to die in fires caused by playing with a heat source than are people of all ages. 65 percent of all fatal victims of child-playing fires were children 5 years old or younger. (Flynn, 2009.)

Playing with a heat source such as lighters or matches caused 5 percent of the civilian deaths and 6 percent of civilian injuries that took place in home structure fires from 2002 to 2005. (Flynn, 2009.) In 1 year, children younger than age 5, playing with multipurpose lighters caused an estimated 800 residential fires that resulted in about 20 deaths, 50 injuries, and \$15.6 million in property damage. (Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), 2000.)

Almost half (42 percent) of child-play home structure fires begin in the bedroom. The most commonly lit items in these fires are mattresses, bedding, and clothing. (Flynn, 2009.)

### Outside Fires

From 2003 to 2006, an estimated 41,100 annual **outside** fires occurred that involved youth fireplay. These fires resulted in estimated losses of one civilian death, 96 civilian injuries, and \$3.3 million in direct property damage, annually. (Flynn, 2009.)

### Youth Between the Ages of 11 and 14 are at the Greatest Risk for Setting Fires

One very noteworthy fact is that even though we have been discussing young children involved in firesetting, statistically speaking, youth between the ages of 11 and 14 are at the greatest risk for setting fires. Boys are at greatest risk of setting fires. Annually, 80 to 85 percent of the identified firesetters are male. (Boberg, 2006.)



### Times, Days, and Months of Juvenile Set Fires

There is no peak day for child-play home structure fires, however, slightly more fires occur on Friday and Saturday. (Flynn, 2009.) The weekend is the clear peak time for outside and *other* type fires. (Flynn, 2009.) Both home structure and outside fires involving youth fireplay follow a similar trend, peaking in the after school hours, before dinner time. (Flynn, 2009.)

However, more home structure fires involving youth fireplay occur during the morning hours between 6 a.m. and 1 p.m. than do outside fires. Conversely, more outside and other fires caused by youth fireplay occur during the hours of 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. (Flynn, 2009.)

Youth fireplay fires peak during the month of July. One out of every four youth fireplay fires that occurred outside was in the month of July. More than two out of every three (67 percent) outside and *other* type youth fireplay fires in July involved fireworks. (Flynn, 2009.)

### Fireworks and Fires

In 1 year, fireworks caused an estimated 22,500 reported fires including

- structure fires: 1,400;
- vehicle fires: 500; and
- outside and other fires: 20,600. (Hall, 2010.)

These fires resulted in an estimated:

- one civilian death;
- forty civilian injuries; and
- direct property damage: \$42 million. (Hall, 2010.)

The risk of fireworks injury was the highest for teens ages 15 to 19 and children 5 to 9, both with at least 2-1/2 times the risk for the general population. (Hall, 2010.) Two of five (40 percent) people injured by fireworks were under the age of 15. (Hall, 2010.)

### The Good News about Child-Set Fires

**Since 1980**, all structure fires involving fireplay have decreased 79 percent and home structure fires have decreased 81 percent. (Flynn, 2009.) During the same period, civilian deaths caused by fireplay have declined by 84 percent. Injuries have decreased by 61 percent. (Hall, 2010.) Property loss (adjusted to inflation) has declined by 38 percent. (Hall, 2010.) Outside and other fires have decreased 95 percent since 1980. (Flynn, 2009.)

**Since 1995**, outside and other fires involving fireplay have decreased 86 percent. Home structure fires have decreased 57 percent and structure fires as a whole have decreased 42 percent. (Flynn, 2009.)

In 1994, the CPSC set a mandatory safety standard requiring the manufacturing and importation of cigarette lighters to be child-resistant. The standard requires that lighters resist the efforts of 85 percent of the children to operate them in a specified test. More than 95 percent of the estimated half-billion lighters purchased annually in the United States are covered by the standard. (Flynn, 2009, CPSC, 1993.) In a 2002 evaluation of the effectiveness of the 1994 CPSC lighter safety standard, the CPSC found a 58 percent reduction in fires caused by children younger than 5, compared to children over the age of 5. (Smith and Greene, 2002.)

### **Youth Firesetting and Arson**

The crime of arson has the highest rate of juvenile involvement as compared to all other crimes. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), nearly half of all arson arrests in the United States are of juveniles under the age of 18. Nearly one-third of those arrested were under the age of 15 and 5 percent were under the age of 10. (FBI, 2006.) According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report ((UCR), 2006) there were a total of 11,972 arrests for arson. Of those arson arrests, 5,868 were under the age of 18. (FBI, 2006.)

Of the juveniles arrested for arson in the United States in 2006, 79 percent were white. (FBI, 2006.) In 2008, there was an estimated 6,600 juveniles arrested for arson in the United States. Fifty-six percent of those arrested were under age 15 and 12 percent were female. (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), 2009.) After being relatively stable for most of the 1980s, the juvenile arrest rate for arson grew 33 percent between 1990 and 1994. (OJJDP, 2009.)

The juvenile arrest rate for arson declined substantially between 1994 and 2008, falling 46 percent. (OJJDP, 2009.) Following a 19 percent decline between 2006 and 2008, the juvenile arrest rate for arson in 2008 reached its lowest point since 1980. (OJJDP, 2009.)

### **School Fires**

The most deadly school fire in American history occurred on December 1, 1958 at the Our Lady of the Angels parochial school on Chicago's west side. Ninety-two students and three nuns were killed. The fire was started by an angry student.

According to the National Fire Data Center (NFDC) (2007), from 2003 to 2005, there was an estimated annual average of 14,700 fires on nonadult school properties which caused an average of 100 injuries and an estimated \$85 million in property loss. (Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 2007.)

## Causes of School Fires

### Preschools

Structure fires in preschools and daycare centers are predominantly due to cooking (64 percent), followed by heating (7 percent), and electrical distribution (6 percent). (FEMA, 2007.) The causes for fires in kindergarten or elementary schools mostly involve cooking (27 percent), incendiary or suspicious activity (25 percent), and heating (12 percent). (FEMA, 2007.)

### Middle, Junior, or Senior High Schools

The primary cause of fires in middle, junior, or senior high schools is due to incendiary or suspicious activity (47 percent), followed by cooking (15 percent), and heating (7 percent). (FEMA, 2007.)

## Time, Day, and Month of School Fires

According to the NFDC, overall, the average peak month for school fires was July. The lowest incidence of school fires occurred between December and February. (FEMA, 2007.)

### Elementary School Fires

The NFDC, states that the sharp increase in July school fires is driven by the number of elementary school fires. Suggesting that elementary schools may be more attractive targets for incendiary or suspicious fires during the summer when fewer staff members monitor the school campuses. (FEMA, 2007.)

### Middle, Junior, and Senior High Schools

Middle, junior, and senior high schools had more fire incidents in the fall and spring, the beginning and end of the school year. (FEMA, 2007.)

According to NFCD, 55 percent of fires on school properties occur between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., the hours that students are most likely to be at school. Thirty percent of school fires occur between 5 p.m. and midnight, and 15 percent of school fires occur between midnight and 8 a.m. (FEMA, 2007.)

## Where School Fires Start

The three leading areas where school fires begin are the bathroom, kitchen, and small assembly areas. (FEMA, 2007.) Twenty-five percent of all school structure fires begin in bathroom trash

cans and they are of an incendiary or suspicious nature. (FEMA, 2007.) Seventy-eight percent of all school bathroom fires occur in middle, junior, and senior high schools. (FEMA, 2007.)

### Most Common Materials that are Ignited

The most common materials ignited in school fires are paper (25 percent), plastic (14 percent), wood (11 percent), and fabric (9 percent). (FEMA, 2007.)

### Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention Program Personnel

It is very important that the youth firesetting prevention and intervention program personnel have a good working relationship with the schools and school district(s) in their community. There has to be an element of trust formed between the youth firesetting prevention and intervention program and the school personnel or the school personnel may be reluctant to contact the youth firesetting prevention and intervention program staff, the fire department, and law enforcement if there is a school fire situation.

Many schools and school districts fear that if they report school fires, it will damage their reputation and cause the fear in their community that their school is a "bad" school, thus lowering the school's or district's rating. This might result in a loss of funding opportunities.

## **YOUTH USE OF EXPLOSIVE DEVICES**

Youths have experimented with constructing and using incendiary/explosive/pressure-creating devices for decades. Experimentation and purposeful acts of destruction have expanded dramatically as a result of easy access to information. Youths have easy access to instructions on how to make/use devices. Many Web sites provide visual examples of youths engaged in dangerous behaviors involving incendiary/explosive and pressure-creating devices. Easy access to information, combined with natural curiosity and peer influences can create disastrous consequences.

## **UNDERSTANDING YOUR PROBLEM**

Understanding the youth firesetting problem in your community is the first step in developing your firesetting prevention and intervention program.

Collecting the available information on the youth firesetting problem in your community will demonstrate to the community the need for a firesetting prevention and intervention program and will answer the following questions:

- Who is setting fires in your community?

- What kinds of fires are being set by juveniles?
- What costs are associated with these fires (injuries, lives lost, property damage, loss of environmental resources, etc.)?

The precourse assignment for *Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention* (YFPI) required you to conduct research on the topics listed above. Finding data on the occurrence and effects of youth firesetting at the local level **may** have been a challenging process. Knowing, or attempting to discover, the extent of the problem will encourage individuals and agencies to support a program to meet the needs of the community.

Demonstrating the need for a program based on current youth firesetting data from your community is the first step in identifying and justifying the need for a firesetter intervention program. Remember, many youths who set fires never get reported to the fire or police departments. The development of your firesetting intervention program might be the catalyst to get these fires reported!

## SUMMARY

- In this unit, we identified the extent of the juvenile firesetting problem in students' own communities and in the United States.
- Now that we understand the extent of the juvenile firesetting problem, we need to understand what motivates juveniles to set fires. In Unit 4: *Who Sets Fires and Why?*, we will look at who sets fires and why they do it.
- This evening's homework is to read the background sections of Units 1 through 4 of the Student Manual (SM).
- Students should also review Unit 6: *Trip to Abraxas Youth Center*. Most particularly, the interview forms that will be used during the visit to the Abraxas Secure Firesetter Program.

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## REFERENCES

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**APPENDIX**  
**A BRIEF HISTORY OF RESEARCH ON**  
**YOUTH FIRESETTING**

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## **A Brief History of Research on Youth Firesetting**

### **The Elements of Arson**

When a fire occurs it is the responsibility of the fire investigator to determine the cause of the fire. The fire investigator looks for three elements to determine if the fire can be considered the crime of arson. DeHaan (2002) identified these as follows:

1. There has been a burning of property. This must be shown to the court to be actual destruction, at least in part, not just scorching or sooting (although some states include any physical or visible impairment of any surface).
2. The burning is incendiary in origin. Proof of the existence of an effective incendiary device, no matter how simple it may be, is adequate. Proof must be accomplished by showing specifically how all-possible natural or accidental causes have been considered and ruled out.
3. The burning is shown to be started with malice, that is with intent of destroying property (p. 508).

### **The Early Years of Arson Motives**

According to Wooden and Berkey (1984), "Arson itself is as old as civilization, but it was not until the nineteenth century that there appeared to be much concern about the motivations for it or about the psychological stability of arsonists" (p. 12). As already reported, in the 1800s and early 1900s, considerable emphasis was placed on arsonists suffering from pyromania.

It was not until the mid-1960s that research on the motives of arsonists moved away from theories of a certain type of deviance. In 1966, McKerraccher and Dacre studied 30 adult male arsonists in a forensic psychiatric setting. They found that when compared with 147 adult non-arson offenders, the motives for the arsons were related to feelings of aggression, rather than from a certain type of deviance. In support of McKerraccher and Dacre's findings, Wolford (1972) reported that arsonists were unable to express their anger to others. Vreeland and Waller (1979) supported Wolford's findings when their research found that arsonists could not confront the object(s) of their anger/aggression, and instead the arsonists displaced that anger/aggression against property by starting fires.

In addition to the literature that focuses on pyromania, more current discussions of arson revolve around criminality. The National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) has identified six major categories of arson motives:

1. Profit
2. Vandalism

3. Excitement
4. Revenge
5. Crime concealment
6. Extremism (cited by DeHaan, 2002, p. 509)

According to DeHaan (2002), of these six categories, the vandalism category is most closely associated with juvenile and adolescent firesetting. The fires are "set when the opportunity arises, often after school or work or on weekends. Boredom and frustration among youths, sometimes lead to peer-group challenge to create some excitement" (p. 511).

O'Connor (1987) identified nine categories for the various motives for arson; (a) arson for profit, which would include insurance fraud and welfare fraud; (b) business-related fraud, which includes eliminating the competition and organized crime; (c) demolition and rehabilitation scams and building strippers; (d) revenge and prejudice fires; (e) vanity or hero fires; (f) crime concealment fires; (g) mass civil disturbances; (h) terrorism; and (i) juvenile firesetters and vandalism. Yet in focusing solely on juveniles, O'Connor stated that "a motive for juvenile firesetters is not always apparent" (p. 20), like it is with an adult. In support of O'Connor, Boudreau et al. (1977) stated,

Vandalism is a common cause ascribed to fires set by juveniles who seem to burn property merely to relieve boredom or as a general protest against authority. Many school fires as well as fires in abandoned autos, vacant buildings, and trash receptacles are believed to be caused by this type of arsonist (p. 19).

In other words, according to Boudreau et al. (1977), O'Connor (1987), and DeHaan (2002), unlike arson in general, the motive is not always apparent as to juvenile firesetting and it could be just a symptom of boredom.

### **Juvenile Firesetting**

In reviewing the literature that looks specifically at juvenile firesetting, four theoretical frameworks are evident; (a) Psychoanalytic Theory, (b) Social Learning Theory, (c) Dynamic-Behavioral Theory, and (d) Cycles of Firesetting Oregon Model. Each theory outlines the etiology for juvenile firesetting behavior based on the theoretical perspective of the researchers and three of the four are informed by a mental health perspective and have provided the foundation for the explanations of the motivations of firesetters to date.

#### **Psychoanalytic Theory**

Psychoanalytic Theory is a theory of human development that interprets human development in terms of motives and drives. Those that prescribe to Psychoanalytic Theory believe that human

development is "primarily unconscious and heavily colored by emotion. Behavior is merely a surface characteristic, and it is important to analyze the symbolic meanings of behavior, and that early experiences are important to human development" (Berger, 2005, p. 35). Psychoanalytic Theory prescribes that firesetting is a child's desire to have power over something that he is able to extinguish himself.

### Social Learning Theory

Bandura and Walters (1963) first introduced the Social Learning Theory as an extension of Miller and Dollard's (1941) research on the behavioral interpretation of modeling. Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory looked at the importance of learning through observation and modeling of behaviors, reactions, and attitudes of others. Bandura (1977) stated,

Learning would be exceeding laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. (p. 22)

Bandura (1973) believed that anger and aggression, just like other types of behaviors, were learned through observational learning. An individual's observational learning comes from his or her family, cultural background, peer group, community, and mass media. According to Gaynor and Hatcher (1987), aggressive children come from families where one or more members also demonstrate aggressive behaviors. Through modeling, children learn to exhibit aggressive behaviors. As a result, poor social skills begin to develop within the family and continue to occur outside the family, for example, with peers and in school. Hence the family as well as the youngster's other primary environments reinforces the development of the socially deviant behavior of firesetting. (pp. 46-47)

The link between Social Learning Theory and juvenile firesetting would come from a child seeing a family member or peer set a fire out of anger or aggression.

Current firesetter researchers Kolko and Kazdin (1986), drew on Social Learning Theory to develop a risk-factor model for juvenile firesetters. This model includes three domains: (a) learning experiences and cues, (b) personal repertoire, and (c) parent and family influences and stressors.

Learning experiences and cues would include the child's early modeling and vicarious experiences, early interest and direct experiences, and the availability of adult models and incendiary materials. The personal repertoire would include cognitive components such as limited fire and fire safety awareness, behavioral components such as interpersonal ineffectiveness/skill deficits and antisocial behavior excesses, and motivational components. The parent and family influences and stressors would include limited supervision and monitoring, parental distance and uninvolvedness, parental pathology and limitations, and stressful external events.

## Dynamic-Behavioral Theory

Dr. Ken Fineman (1980) introduced the Dynamic-Behavioral Theory of firesetting in 1980, as a way to show that certain factors predispose a child to firesetting. These factors include (a) personality characteristics, (b) family and social situations, and (c) environmental conditions (see Table 1 for a description of these factors).

**Table 1**

### **Dynamic-Behavioral Theory of Firesetting (Fineman, 1980)**

| <u>Category</u>              | <u>Description</u>   |
|------------------------------|--|
| Personality characteristics  | Child's exhibited behaviors, school adjustment, physical problems, and organic dysfunctions.   |
| Family and social situations | Information about the family system, how the child gets along with family members, how discipline is meted out, and if there is an ongoing crisis within the family. |
| Environmental conditions     | The child receives encouragement to play with fire, models firesetting behavior identified in others, and deals with emotional distress, peer pressure, and stress.  |

Fineman (1995) introduced his Juvenile Firesetter Child and Family Risk Survey as a way to determine the future risk of firesetting of a child already determined to be a firesetter.

## Cycles of Firesetting

Based upon years of experience working with juvenile firesetters, the Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office and the Oregon Treatment Strategies Task Force partnered to develop the Cycles Model of Firesetting. According to Stadolnik (2000), "The Cycles Model is visually represented by four concentric circles that represent the four dimensions of a juvenile's internal and external world that are considered to be related to their likelihood of firesetting" (p. 19). The cycle includes four circles: (a) the emotional/cognitive cycle, (b) the behavior cycle, (c) the family/household cycle, and (d) the community/social cycle. The four circles are described in Table 2.

**Table 2**

**Cycles Model of Firesetting (Stadolnik, 2000)**

| <u>Cycle</u>        | <u>Description</u>  |
|---------------------|---|
| Emotional/cognitive | Juvenile's thoughts and feelings after his or her firesetting event.  |
| Behavior            | Behaviors of the juvenile firesetter that coincide with his or her thoughts and feelings.                                 |
| Family household    | How the family responds to the firesetting event and the emotional environment of the juvenile's household.               |
| Community/social    | Responses by the community to the firesetting and what level of support or restriction the firesetter and family receive. |

A vast number of empirical studies have been informed by these four theoretical frameworks of youth firesetting. The following section discusses this research timeline, beginning with the research of Dr. Helen Yarnell in the 1930s, through the current firesetter research of today. The chronology illustrates a move from studying institutionalized juvenile firesetters to the development of a series of typologies for non-institutionalized juvenile firesetters.

**1930–1960**

During 1937 and 1938, Dr. Helen Yarnell, working in the Psychiatric Division of Bellevue Hospital, undertook one of the very first studies on the phenomenon of juvenile firesetting. The reason for the study stemmed from her discovery that children who were referred to the Psychiatric Division of Bellevue Hospital for observation and firesetting tendencies showed a variation in their clinical firesetting background. Yarnell's study team observed 60 children between the ages of 6 and 15. Sixty percent were between the ages of 6 and 8 and 35% were between the ages of 11 and 15. Only two were girls, ages 6 and 7. The research team reviewed the children's clinical history and completed interviews with each child. According to Yarnell (1940), the adolescent group's findings were much different than that of the younger group; however, Yarnell's study with the adolescent group was incomplete at the time of the printing of her monograph.

In the first column of Table 3 is a list of the findings on the children ages 6 through 8, with the exception of five children who were deemed to be mentally defective. In the second column of Table 3 is a list of the findings on the adolescents, ages 11 through 15. Yarnell found that children aged 6-8, started fires because of a deprivation of love and security at home, whereas older children viewed fire as exciting and entertaining.

**Table 3**

**Findings of Dr. Helen Yarnell's 1937-1938 Study (Yarnell, 1940, pp. 272-286)**

| <u>Ages 6 through 8</u>   | <u>Ages 11 through 15</u>   |
|---|---|
| 1. All of the children are of average to dull normal intelligence, but many had some special educational disability such as reading or arithmetic. This made their school adjustment difficult. | 1. This group showed little anxiety or regret for their firesetting.  |
| 2. In every case, the child had been deprived of love and security in his/her home life.  | 2. Anxiety dreams were infrequent.  |
| 3. They set fires only when under stress in their home situation.   | 3. The fires were planned, set away from home, and many caused losses involving thousands of dollars.   |
| 4. The children set fires, with associated fantasies to burn some member of the family who had either withheld love from the child or become too serious a rival for the love of a parent.      | 4. The adolescents waited to see the fires and enjoyed the noise and excitement from the fire engines.  |
| 5. The fires are set in and around the home, cause little damage, and are usually put out by the child himself; significance is chiefly symbolic.   | 5. The boys tended to go in pairs, with the exclusion of all other friends. The pairs included an aggressive and passive member, suggesting homosexual association; however, the researchers never proved this. |
| 6. The children show other types of asocial behavior such as running away from home, truancy, stealing, and general hyper kinesis and aggression.   |   |
| 7. All children show acute anxiety and suffer from terrifying dreams and fantasies, including vivid attacks by the devil, ghosts, and skeletons.  |   |
| 8. All children have some sexual conflicts and many tell of active masturbation, sodomy, or fellatio; type of activity does not seem significant.   |   |
| 9. Enuresis was noted in only nine of the cases and seemed a part of the general picture rather than specifically associated with the fire motif.   |   |
| 10. A special group of children were orphans who had been placed in boarding homes but failed to make emotional adjustments.  |   |



In a second study begun shortly after Yarnell's study of 1937-1938, Drs. Nolan Lewis and Helen Yarnell (1951) looked at a group of 238 child firesetters between the ages of 5 and 15. In this study the case records were obtained from fire reports, insurance investigators, juvenile research centers, and juvenile courts. The 1951 study included the 30 cases from Yarnell's previous 1937-1938 research study. In this study Lewis and Yarnell reported a wide range of motivations for firesetting. That included;

1. With the exception of children who set fires against the school, the children's intelligence ranged from low average to superior.
2. Most of the fires occurred when the child was found to feel guilty over some type of sexual preoccupation.
3. A number of the fires were symbolic and directed specifically toward one member of the family.
4. Thirty-two percent of the firesetters set the fire because they liked fire and excitement.
5. Twenty-two percent of the firesetters set the fire as revenge against a parent or foster home.
6. Seventeen percent of the firesetters set the fire because they liked to see the fire engines.
7. Fifteen percent of the firesetters set the fire out of revenge against their employer.
8. Eight percent of the firesetters set the fire to be a hero.
9. Six percent of the firesetters set the fire to cover or be associated with stealing.

Both the Yarnell (1940) and the Lewis and Yarnell (1951) studies were the first studies that looked specifically at the child and adolescent firesetter. These studies were the groundwork for future research on child and adolescent firesetting. Unfortunately, it was not until the 1970s when research on juvenile firesetting resumed when fire departments and mental health professionals began to notice the increasing numbers of child and adolescent firesetting incidents.

### 1960–1980

There was little research, aside from that of Lewis and Yarnell, throughout the 1940s and 1950s. It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the fire service and mental health took notice of the large number of reported youth who were setting fires, that were appearing in the fire service statistics of that time.

Macht and Mack (1968) began the resurgence in firesetting research in 1968. They studied four adolescent firesetters ages 16 to 18. In this study they found that all four boys came from stressful home situations. The boys only set fires when they were away from their fathers, and each one of the boy's fathers had some type of significant job involvement with fire. Macht and Mack concluded from their study that fire had come to have a special and pleasurable meaning in the lives of these patients...In an important sense the firesetting represents a call from the overburdened adolescent to the absent father in order to bring him to the rescue...The activity in connection with fire served to reestablish a lost relationship with the father. (p. 286)

Folkman and Siegelman (1971) undertook a pilot study to explore the firesetting behavior in 47 randomly selected normal children ages 6 and 7. In this study, Folkman and Siegelman found that only two boys had come to the attention of the fire service for setting fires. However, 60% of the boys and 33% of the girls were found to have an interest in fire, which was exhibited by either a self-report of previous firesetting or reporting they had asked to light matches. During this time the focus expanded to identifying treatment options for juvenile firesetters.

During a California State Psychological Association conference in 1975, a group of fire service personnel and psychologists met to discuss the issue of juvenile firesetting. The reason for this discussion was the fact that both fire service and mental health had been receiving referrals on juvenile firesetters and neither group knew how to help these children. Out of this meeting the Fire Service and Arson Prevention Committee was formed to design methods to work with the child firesetters. According to Gaynor and Hatcher (1987), this committee received a grant from the United States Fire Administration to begin work on designing and developing a method to classify juvenile firesetting behavior and to determine the risk of future firesetting in children who have been identified as firesetters. This committee's work provided the basis for the evaluation and classification system used today with youth firesetters.

Bernard Levin (1976) wrote about the psychological characteristics of firesetters. The main focus of this article was on the adult firesetter; however, he did discuss children and fire by stating,

Most people are fascinated by fire. This fascination starts at an early age and manifests itself in young children playing with matches. While people may not outgrow their basic fascination with fire, normal children learn that playing with matches is not acceptable behavior and discontinue it by the age of five or six. A few children continue to play with matches or deliberately set destructive fires, and their chronic firesetting is an observable symptom of a psychological disturbance. (p. 38)

He went on to discuss two types of treatments used when working with chronic juvenile firesetters. The first treatment discussed by Welsh (1971) was stimulus satiation. This technique requires a firesetter to strike matches for an hour a day until the firesetter is sick of lighting the matches and stops match lighting and/or firesetting. The second treatment is through positive reinforcement that is accompanied with the threat of punishment by loss (Holland, 1969). This technique requires a child to bring any found match packages to his father, who would then give him a reward for his positive behavior. This treatment would cause the child to develop positive nonfiresetting behaviors based on the positive reward.

The literature on juvenile firesetting from the 1940s through the 1970s focused either on diagnosis or treatment. During this time, Heath, Gayton, and Hardesty (1976) reviewed the literature on juvenile firesetting and found only six journal articles that exclusively discussed juvenile firesetting and 17 articles on issues related to juvenile firesetting. Unfortunately, they were unable to get their literature review article published in the United States, so they relied upon the Canadian Psychiatric Association to publish the literature review in their journal.

However, from the 1980s through today, the literature has proven to be ripe with research on juvenile firesetting, just not specific to the motivations of school firesetters or the phenomenon of school fires.

### 1980–Today

From the 1980s through today, there have been many different foci of youth firesetter research, including (a) the impact of the environment on the juvenile firesetter's behavior (Fineman, 1980; Gaynor & Hatcher, 1987; Vreeland & Waller, 1979); (b) psychiatric disorders as the catalyst for juvenile firesetting (Fineman, 1980; Freud, 1932; Heath et al., 1976; Kolko & Kazdin, 1986; Kuhnley, Henderson, & Quinland, 1982; Lewis & Yarnell, 1951; Williams, 2005; Wooden & Berkey, 1984; Yarnell, 1940). (c) firesetting as a learned behavior (Gaynor & Hatcher, 1987; Kolko & Kazdin, 1986; Vreeland & Waller, 1979); (d) juvenile firesetter assessment and evaluation instruments (Fineman 1980, 1995; Gaynor & Hatcher, 1987; Sakheim & Osborn, 1994; Slavkin, 2000; Stadolnik, 2000); (e) mental health and educational interventions (Bumpass, Fagelman, & Brix, 1983; Fineman, 1980, 1995; Kolko & Kazdin, 1986, 1991; Sakheim & Osborn, 1994; Stadolnik, 2000; Wooden & Berkey, 1984), and (f) juvenile firesetter motives and typologies (Cotterall, 1999; Fineman, 1980; Gaynor & Hatcher, 1987; Hall, 2006; Kolko & Kazdin, 1991; Meade, 1998; Sakheim & Osborn, 1994; Swaffer & Hollin, 1995; Terjestam & Ryden, 1996). Because the specific focus of this dissertation is on the self-reported motivations of students who set school fires, the following section focuses strictly on the literature regarding firesetter motives and typologies. While the typologies contain anywhere from three to nine categories of firesetter motives, they all range from the curious to the pathological firesetter.

### School Fires and Firesetting

According to historical information on school fires, there have been three devastating school fires in the history of the United States. A synopsis of each of these school fires follows. The first school fire occurred on March 4, 1908 at the Lakeview Elementary School in Collinwood, Ohio. The cause of the fire was said to be wood joists coming in contact with an overheated steam pipe that started the fire. This fire killed 172 students and 2 teachers (Gottschalk, 2002). The second devastating school fire occurred on March 18, 1937, in New London, Texas. A disgruntled school employee who had been reprimanded for smoking and wanted to get back at the school administrators started the New London School fire. He tampered with the gas lines so as to run up the school gas bill. An explosion ensued which killed 294 students and staff (Gottschalk, 2002). The third school fire occurred on December 1, 1958 in Chicago, Illinois at

the Our Lady of the Angels School. A fifth grade student lighting a cardboard waste barrel in the school basement started this school fire. The fire claimed the lives of 92 students and 3 nuns.

All of these fires caused community devastation, millions of dollars in property loss, and the most precious loss of all, the loss of life. However, only the fire at Our Lady of the Angles School was started by a school student.

According to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), in 2002, there were an estimated 14,300 fires in kindergarten through twelfth grade educational institutions, causing an estimated \$103,600,000 in property damage and 122 injuries (FEMA, 2004).

The leading cause of these school fires was incendiary/suspicious activity accounting for 37% of all school structure fires. Fifty-two percent of all middle and high school fires have been attributed to incendiary/suspicious activity (FEMA, 2004). The NFIRS report stated that 78% of all school fires occur during the school week and 55% of these fires occur between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. when youth are likely to be at school (FEMA, 2004). Today, deaths from school fires are rare, but injuries per fire were higher in school structure fires than nonresidential structure fires on average per the United States Fire Administration (2005). Also according to the USFA (2001), "Each year in the United States, there are an estimated 1,300 fires in high schools, private and prep schools and college dormitories. These fires are responsible for less than 5 deaths, approximately 50 injuries and \$4.1 million in property loss annually" (p. 1) But what about in Phoenix, Arizona?

In 2005, there were a total of 99 school fires occurring during school hours in K-12 educational institutions that were reported to the Phoenix Fire Department's Youth Firesetter Intervention Program (2006). These reports over the past five years along with the fire at Our Lady of the Angels School prompted this research on the motivations of students who set school fires. Are they troubled students who dislike school, as was the case with the fire set at our Our Lady of the Angels School? Do the motivations for student firesetters follow the motivation typologies found in previous research on firesetters? What does previous research say about school firesetters?

### School Firesetters

In Lewis and Yarnell's (1951), study from 1937–1938 of 238 child firesetters, 61 had set fires in either churches or schools (no differentiation between church or school was given). The reasons these firesetters gave for setting their school fires were predominately based on hatred, revenge, and the desire to destroy the school building, hoping that they would no longer have to attend school. Some of their other reasons included the following comments:

1. "We didn't like the looks of the teacher."
2. "I got a bad report card and thought I'd make a fire and blow it up."
3. "I was mad, because I didn't pass."

4. "I was tired of going to school."
5. "The teacher picked on me." (p. 300)

Some of the secondary reasons these students gave for setting the school fires was to see the fire, see the fire engines, and be the hero that discovers the fire. The researchers went on to say that these children might also vandalize school property, steal from teachers and staff, leave obscene notes on the teacher's desk, and mutilate the teacher's clothing. Their classroom behavior and schoolwork was poor at best and they showed a "predominately dull or borderline intelligence with special learning disabilities, and all of them were unable to compete in the classroom" (p. 300). Lewis and Yarnell (1951) also stated that children under age 10 rarely set school fires and the most frequent age group of school firesetters is between 12 and 14 years of age. In Wooden and Berkey's (1984) study, they found that the "greatest number of fires (37%) set by the delinquent firesetters" were school-related fires (p. 72). The motives for these school fires were found to be "revenge, spite, or disruption of classroom activities" (p. 77). The median age for the school firesetters in Wooden and Berkey's (1984) study was 14 and the fires were most often set in the classroom, school closets, under the teacher's desk, or in the wastebasket. They also found that most of the school firesetters were considered trouble-making students and the fires occurred after being punished by a teacher or school administrator. In the body of current literature, only two examples of differing motives appear.

In an article written by Jeff Meade (1998) titled *Fire Power*, while not a study about school firesetters but rather a compilation of information about school fires written for *Education Week*, Meade discussed school firesetting with juvenile firesetter researcher Paul Schwartzman. Schwartzman suggested that there was no one main reason juvenile firesetters target schools; however, he did suggest the following possible motives behind school firesetting:

1. A prank
2. To get out of final exams
3. Peer pressure
4. Seeking attention

Other possible motives behind school firesetting discussed by Meade (1998) include revenge, school disruption, anger, or no explanation at all. Hall (2006) reported that "deliberate fires in schools are often a result of mucking about which gets out of hand" (p. 2). However, according to Hall's report, Dr. Jack Kennedy, a clinical forensic psychologist, reverted to a pathological explanation, asserting that there was a deeper reason for school fires. Kennedy stated,

For children, school is normally a focal point for their social world. So that's where they're going to be exposed to frustrations, to issues of tolerance, and anger. And because they place social controls on children, schools—unfortunately—often annoy them, cause them to be disgruntled, or to feel hard done by. The results can be starting a fire to vent anger, or exact revenge against the school, or against the teacher. It's rare that there is not some sort of trail or story behind a fire at school. Fires may be like a friend to some of these children, the one thing they feel gives them some power. (Hall, 2006, pp. 2-3)

As has been evidenced by the scant research that focuses specifically on school firesetters, little is known about the motivations behind school fires. In Lewis and Yarnell's (1951) research, all of the school firesetters had "predominately dull or borderline intelligence with special learning disabilities and all of them were unable to compete in the classroom" (p. 300). In Wooden and Berkey's study in 1984, all of the school firesetters were troubled students who set school fires after a teacher or school administrator had punished them. Meade and Hall speculated about the motives of school firesetters, but undertook no actual research to support their hypotheses

(This information was taken from the following source: Boberg, J. (2006). *An exploratory case study of the self-reported motivations of students who set school fire*. Flagstaff, AZ; NAU) (Chapter 2)

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