

Be Fire Smart: Keep Matches, Lighters Away From Children

Many deadly fires each year are the direct result of children playing with matches and lighters, according to John Reich, deputy director for LLR's Division of Fire and Life Safety.

" Children do not understand the dangers of fire and are fascinated by its movement and color," Reich said.

" The United States has one of the highest fire death rates in the world, and fire is the second leading cause of accidental death in the home," he said. "More than 3,000 people die each year in home fires, and 500,000 residential fires occur each year exceeding 4 billion dollars in property loss. Each year more than 200 fire deaths are associated with fires started by cigarette lighters. About two-thirds of these result from children playing with lighters."

Children under 5 years old playing with lighters cause more than 5,000 residential fires a year, resulting in approximately 150 deaths and more than 1,000 injuries in the US, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. (CPSC). Although children as young as two years old are capable of operating lighters, the majority of the children who start fire by playing with lighters are ages 3 & 4. At these ages, children are curious about fire and do not understand the inherent dangers. Typically when children start a fire they do not tell anyone and often hide becoming a victim.

Since 1994, the CPSC has set a mandatory safety standard that requires disposable lighters to be child -resistant. The standard covers 95% of the 600 million lighters purchased in the United States each year.

Reich offers the following safety tips to parents:

- Purchase & use child-resistant lighters only. Remember that these are child-resistant, not childproof. Always keep matches and lighters out of the reach of children.
- Never use a lighter as a source of amusement for children. That practice may encourage children to think of lighters and matches as toys, not tools. Once a child's curiosity is aroused, children may seek out a lighter and try to light it at a later time.
- Teach children to tell an adult if they find matches or lighters.

"Our office wants to help prevent tragedies caused by children playing with fire," Reich said. "Parents who are fire smart about matches and lighters around the house can help us achieve this critical goal."

LLR's Division of Fire and Safety includes the Office of State Fire Marshal and the South Carolina Fire Academy. The state Fire Marshal's Office is responsible for ensuring compliance with state fire safety regulations and coordinating fire safety education programs. The Fire Academy provides emergency services training to municipal fire services (paid and volunteer), airport crash rescue departments, industrial fire brigades and emergency teams from around the state and the world.