



YOUTH FIRESETTING PREVENTION & INTERVENTION

VISION 20/20 PROJECT · INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS, USA BRANCH

FIRE CHIEF BRIEFING

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS: YOUTH-SET FIRES ARE A SIGNIFICANT, OFTEN UNDERRECOGNIZED CAUSE OF PREVENTABLE FIRE DEATHS, INJURIES, AND PROPERTY LOSS IN THE UNITED STATES

THE ISSUE

Each year, thousands of fires are started by children and teens, resulting in civilian deaths, injuries, and millions of dollars in property loss. Children under age 10 are at highest risk, with many incidents occurring in the home. Youth firesetting is not simply a “fire problem” — it is a behavioral indicator. Curiosity, lack of supervision, stress, or behavioral health concerns can all contribute, and without intervention this behavior tends to escalate.

49K+

Youth-set fires reported annually in the U.S. (NFPA)

300+

Deaths per year attributed to youth-set fires

Under 10

Age group at highest risk; many incidents occur in the home

WHY IT MATTERS TO FIRE CHIEFS

Addressing youth firesetting aligns directly with Community Risk Reduction (CRR) efforts and supports your Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover by targeting a preventable cause of fires. Even departments without a formal program or trained specialists can make a meaningful impact by recognizing the issue and connecting youth with appropriate intervention resources.

WHAT FIRE DEPARTMENTS CAN DO

1 Identify and Act

- Train personnel to recognize signs of youth firesetting behavior
- Document incidents and ensure consistent follow-up
- Early identification alone can interrupt a dangerous pattern

2 Connect to Professionals

- Not every department needs to build a full program internally
- Establish referral pathways to mental health, regional programs, or partner agencies
- Turning cases over to trained specialists is a responsible approach

3 Invest in Training

- Send members to the NFA's Youth Firesetting Prevention & Intervention course
- One trained member can serve as a coordinator and resource for your agency

4 Promote Safe Behaviors

- Reinforce public education on securing matches and lighters in the home
- Incorporate messaging into inspections, school visits, and outreach

5 Build Partnerships

- Collaborate with schools, juvenile justice, social services, and healthcare providers
- Shared responsibility across community partners leads to better outcomes for at-risk youth

NATIONAL RESOURCES & SUPPORT

The Vision 20/20 Project

CRR frameworks and tools to integrate youth firesetting prevention into your department's strategy.

strategicfire.org

YFIRES Resource Center

Program development guidance, screening tools, training opportunities, and subject matter experts in youth firesetting intervention.

yfires.com

National Fire Academy

Offers the Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention course, equipping personnel with assessment and intervention skills.

usfa.fema.gov/nfa

KEY TAKEAWAY

Youth-set fires are **preventable**, and fire departments do not have to solve the problem alone. Whether by developing internal capability or connecting families to trained professionals, your department can play a pivotal role in breaking the cycle. **Established, credible resources are ready to support you** — taking the first step to identify the issue and engage those resources can make a lasting difference in your community.