



YOUTH FIRESETTING PREVENTION & INTERVENTION

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

STATE FIRE MARSHAL BRIEFING

STATEWIDE POLICY & LEADERSHIP BRIEF

Youth Firesetting Prevention & Intervention · Vision 20/20 Project

⚠️ YOUTH-SET FIRES ARE A SIGNIFICANT AND OFTEN UNDERRECOGNIZED PUBLIC SAFETY PROBLEM REQUIRING STATEWIDE LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATED ACTION

THE ISSUE

Youth-set fires remain a significant and often underrecognized public safety problem in the United States. In many cases, firesetting is not about the fire — it is a behavioral indicator. Curiosity, lack of supervision, stress, or deeper behavioral health concerns can all contribute. Without effective intervention, firesetting can lead to escalating criminal activity and increased risk to individuals, families, and communities.

49K+

Youth-set fires reported in the U.S. annually, resulting in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries (NFPA)

Gateway

Firesetting is a recognized gateway crime — left unaddressed, it escalates to more serious criminal behavior

97%+

Intervention effectiveness rate when root causes are identified and addressed through trained professionals

CRITICAL INTELLIGENCE: LINK TO MASS VIOLENCE

Research from the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (Mass Attacks in Public Spaces: 2016–2020) finds that many youth engaged in firesetting develop characteristics similar to those who commit mass violence. Early identification and intervention in gateway behaviors is a critical statewide public safety strategy.

WHY IT MATTERS TO STATE FIRE MARSHALS

Addressing youth-set fires aligns directly with Community Risk Reduction (CRR) efforts and supports your Statewide Collaboration and Engagement Framework (SCEF). Fire departments play a critical role in early identification, and even without a formal statewide program, connecting youth with appropriate resources is a meaningful and impactful step.

WHAT STATE FIRE MARSHALS CAN DO

1 Identify and Act

- Train fire departments to recognize signs of youth firesetting behavior
- Have departments document incidents in YFIRES 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 statewide referral pathways to mental health providers, regional programs, or partner agencies
- Turning cases to trained specialists is a responsible, effective approach

3 Invest in Training

- Direct departments to the NFA's Youth Firesetting Prevention & Intervention course
- Even one trained member per department can serve as a statewide coordinator and resource

4 Promote Safe Behaviors

- Reinforce public education around securing fire-starting materials at the state level
- Provide messaging for departments to use in inspections, school visits, and community outreach

5 Build Statewide Partnerships

- Facilitate collaboration between fire departments, schools, juvenile justice, social services, and mental healthcare providers from the state level
- Shared responsibility and cross-agency coordination leads to better outcomes for at-risk youth and stronger communities statewide

NATIONAL RESOURCES & SUPPORT

Strategic Fire

CRR leadership, frameworks, and tools to integrate youth firesetting prevention into statewide strategy.

strategicfire.org

YFIRES Resource Center

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

yfires.com

National Fire Academy

Offers the Youth Firesetting Prevention & Intervention course, equipping personnel with skills to assess, intervene, and coordinate care.

usfa.fema.gov/nfa

KEY TAKEAWAY

Youth-set fires are **preventable**, and demand statewide leadership. Whether by building fire department capability or connecting families to trained professionals, your State Fire Marshal's Office can play a pivotal role. **Established resources are ready to support you** — taking the first step to identify the issue and engage those resources can make a lasting difference across your state.