



**State of West Virginia
Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety**

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"Children and Fire"

"The single most important step in protecting children from fire is adults taking responsibility for their own actions," said State Fire Marshal Sterling Lewis, Jr. "In the majority of fires set by children, there are adults involved who failed to supervise their children, failed to keep matches and lighters out of reach, or otherwise failed to set a good example in terms of fire safety."

Because of their lack of experience, young children are at double the risk of dying in a fire as compared to the rest of the population. In fact, 50% of people who start reported fires by playing are 5 years of age and younger, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

Even more tragic is that 63% of all fatality victims of these types of fires are also 5 years old or younger. Non-fatal injuries many times involve parents or other caregivers, but fatal injuries seldom do.

Some characteristics of child-playing home fires:

- They are started with lighters or matches.
- Almost half of the home structure fires involved begin in the bedroom.
- Items ignited by child-play fires are usually mattresses, bedding, or clothing.
- Most child-play fires start outside.
- July is the peak month for outdoor fire-play. Most of these fires involve fireworks.

The U.S. Fire Administration offers these tips to stop children from starting a fire, before it starts:

- Keep matches and lighters locked up out of reach of children. This should be a location where a child is least likely to explore.
- Teach your children to tell you when they find matches and lighters—but not to touch these themselves. They are tools for grownups only.
- Check under beds and in closets for burnt matches or other clues your child is playing with fire.

How Adults Can Prepare Their Families For a Fire:

- Have working smoke alarms in your home on every level, and outside each sleeping area (also inside each bedroom if you sleep with the door closed). A smoke alarm, while not as effective as residential fire sprinklers, can still give you valuable advance notification of fire—and time to escape.
- Let children know what a smoke alarm sounds like, and what to do when they hear it.
- Always dress children in pajamas that meet federal flammability standards. If these are exposed to a small open flame, the flame should go out. Do not dress children in 100% cotton clothes, such as oversize T-shirts.
- Teach children not to hide from firefighters, but to get out of the house quickly and call for help from somewhere else.
- Teach children to crawl low under smoke to get out of the house if there's fire.
- Show them how to “stop, drop and roll” if their clothing's on fire.
- Make and practice a home escape fire plan, including a meeting place outside. Know at least 2 escape routes from bedrooms.
- A good website for children and families can be found at www.usfa.fema.gov. Click on “USFA Kids” for resources for parents and children, interactive fire safety puzzles, coloring pages and more.

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