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BIG FIRES START SMALL

A child's curiosity can be detrimental

Sycamore, IL. February 1, 2017 – It is in our nature as adults to protect children from danger. Adults recognize the danger of fire, and in most cases, children understand how fire can be dangerous and how it can hurt others. It is not unusual for children to be curious about fire. Fire is a tool used in our everyday lives; enjoying campfires with friends, cooking on the stove, heating our homes or even lighting candles for parties. Often times, danger can be extinguished with a simple message from a parent or adult. In other cases, it is important to be watchful for behavior that may indicate fire play. Between 2007 and 2011, an average of 49,300 fires were reported due to playing with fire in the United States. These fires caused an annual average of 80 civilian deaths, 860 civilian injuries and a reported \$235 million in property damage.

Childhood is a period of exploration. Children are discovering new sights, sounds, tastes and smells. When a preschool-aged child discovers fire, it is another part of the world they are exploring. Without understanding the dangers fire presents or how to react, they may self-experiment somewhere alone. Unfortunately, these fires are most dangerous because they often begin in a concealed space, such as a closet.

As children grow older, the “mystery” of fire becomes a fascination. Children begin to understand how fire can be made and are now at the age where they start to use different materials such as paper, matches or candles to watch them burn. Often times this happens while an adult is around, but it is still common for this activity to occur in a concealed fashion.

Once a child reaches school-age, they should be more aware of the dangers associated with using fire inappropriately. If a child deliberately sets a fire after being reprimanded or punished, a parent needs to speak with that child and should consider seeking professional help. Children may start fires for a number of reasons such as; anger, attention seeking, stressors at home or school, or problems with friends. Fire play may be their reaction to those issues and be a cry for help.

The Sycamore Fire Department's Fire Prevention Team has certified specialists who can help with children playing inappropriately with fire through a safety program. This program consists of informal gatherings which help children understand the risks and danger of fire when used improperly.

For more information on juvenile fire safety, or assistance with a child and their curiosity with fire, please contact the Sycamore Fire Department at (815) 895-4514, or visit us on Facebook at City of Sycamore Fire Department for occasional postings.