



# play safe! be safe!®



B U L L E T I N



## BC FIRE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE FOCUSES ON COALITION BUILDING

The idea for a juvenile fire setting safety workshop came to Ellen Pelto shortly after she joined the Office of Fire Commissioner, Emergency Management British Columbia, as Public Education Coordinator last year. The last conference of this type had been held four years earlier in Vancouver and childcare providers were not included. She envisioned a two-day juvenile fire safety conference that would include both the fire safety and childcare communities.

"The challenge," relates Pelto, "was to develop a program that would appeal to both groups and also present an opportunity to revitalize British Columbia's juvenile fire setting program." BC currently has a core curriculum for preschoolers, *Getting to Know Fire*, which is similar to NFPA's program, but Pelto felt that a professional development day would enhance and enrich it.

With this gem of an idea, Pelto began to assemble a program, which would include a *play safe! be safe!* workshop, as well as a special workshop that Dr. Robert Cole presented to fire service personnel on coalition building. "We reached out to many experts like Dr. Cole, approaching juvenile safety from a variety of angles," continues Pelto. "Some were less conventional than others."

Smiling, she recalls, "For instance, Pam Moody, owner of ACTS Entertainment, a company that teaches the art and skill of clowning to safety professionals who use these skills with educating children, presented a clowning demonstration at lunchtime and then later gave a workshop on how to use characterization effectively with children. We had an ex-arson investigator talk about danger signs to recognize in juvenile fire setters, a member of the police department discussed techniques for interviewing children, and also had a session on coalition building. We ended the day with a panel of experts in the field of juvenile fire setting.



## **BC FIRE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE FOCUSES ON COALITION BUILDING (continued)**

"I was pleased to present the *play safe! be safe!*® program as part of the workshop," says Pelto. "It is a perfect complement to our current program. And the kit, with its hands-on classroom components, is a valuable tool for both fire service and childcare providers."

Pelto scheduled the conference for a Friday and Saturday, in the hopes of reaching out to childcare providers who could not attend a weekday program. The Friday session was exclusively for fire service personnel; Saturday for both groups.

"I also felt it was important to present the conference in an attractive venue," continues Pelto, "to make it special, especially for the childcare professionals. That's why I selected one of our nicest hotels, the Empress, as the site for the conference. I wanted participants to feel like it was an outing."

Not only was the setting special, but a continental breakfast was served and Pelto even invited a vendor who sold fire-related merchandise, such as stuffed animals, tattoos, etc., which was a big hit with the teachers. "We also presented them with goody bags filled with helpful brochures and other items," notes Pelto.

The conference attracted close to 300 attendees from Victoria. Pelto hopes to stage similar events, though smaller in scope, in the interior and north of BC. She also plans to do a follow-up survey to determine how many teachers are using the program and how the children are responding.

## **Ask Dr. Cole Fire Safety....It starts with you!**

In past columns, I've reviewed every aspect of the Health Belief Model (HBM) to help understand and then overcome the barriers that prevent people from following through on fire safety education. The final HBM topic, and the biggest challenge, is "changing the social norm."

When I begin this discussion in a workshop, I always use two examples—seat belts and smoking—to illustrate the long, arduous process of changing the social norm. For instance, it was in the early 1970s that the first big push to use seat belts started. Now, when you get into a car, the automatic response is to "buckle up." Similarly, it was in the early 1960s when the first Surgeon General's Report on the dangers of smoking was published, but it took more than 40 years, and the banning of smoking in restaurants and the workplace, before real change occurred.

## **Ask Dr. Cole (continued)**

Broad acceptance is a slow process, which is achieved through a combination of education and legislation. Legislation legitimizes what we teach.

In terms of family fire safety, smoke alarms are generally accepted now, but we still have to educate people to test them periodically. Thinking about an exit plan and then practicing it is tougher and that's where social norms come into play. We have to make designing and executing an exit plan so common a practice that people will do it because they know everyone does it, and they don't want to appear reckless.

So, how do we change social norms? You do it first by example. Share your fire safety message with others, again and again. Our *play safe! be safe!* workshops also help to "seed" community activism. Participants go back to their classrooms and teach these fire safety lessons to their students. In turn, these youngsters become the teachers to their parents and siblings. It's hard to look into a child's eyes and not want to keep them safe. We share a common concern, and it's our continuing commitment and collective efforts that will eventually change social norms.

## **New York City Issues Child Fatality Report**

Two years ago, New York City's Department of Health & Mental Hygiene and Fire Department established a multi-disciplinary Child Fatality Review Team to examine fatal injuries among children between the ages of 1 and 12. After reviewing data from 2001-2006, the team found that the number one cause of unintentional fatalities in the home is fires and burns. (The leading cause of children's deaths overall is motor vehicle accidents.) While fire fatality rates have decreased in New York City, as they have nationally, the team concluded that even more children's lives could be saved with awareness and education. Following are some highlights from the study, which closely parallel national statistics.

- 50% of the child fire deaths occurred in children age one to five years.
- Working smoke detectors were found in only one quarter of homes where a fire resulted in a fire death.
- Nearly nine in ten children (89 percent) who died in a fire were at home with an adult.
- Of the fatal fires started by children playing with matches or lighters, 81 percent started in a bedroom - most often a child's room.
- Unattended candles were the third most common cause of fire fatalities.

The report includes recommendations, key messages to teach children, outlines the City's ongoing initiative to improve child safety, and presents a series of action steps. To download a pdf of the report go to:

[http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/nyregion/city\\_room/Child\\_Fatality\\_2008.pdf](http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/nyregion/city_room/Child_Fatality_2008.pdf)

## Toylike Lighter Awareness & Legislation Grows

Updates about the dangers of toylike lighters have become a regular feature of the *play safe! be safe!® Bulletin*. Following are recent educational, legislative and media highlights.

### **Legislation**

- Maine Governor John E. Baldacci signed LD 2081 into law at the end of March 2008, an act to prohibit the retail sale and distribution of novelty lighters. "Many novelty lighters resemble toys," Governor Baldacci said. "With statistics that show that more than 5,000 household fires are caused each year by children under the age of 5, anything we can do to prevent children from playing with lighters will serve to save lives and homes."

John C. Dean, Maine State Fire Marshal, wrote the bill as "emergency" legislation and, as a result, the law took effect immediately. Commenting on the passage of this legislation, Fire Marshal Dean said: "For me, this was the most significant policy decision of this session, and I am very pleased that I had the support of the fire service, healthcare professionals, child safety advocates, members of the legislature, and the Governor."

- In April, the Tennessee legislature passed and the Governor approved a law banning the sale of novelty lighters in the state. The Tennessee State Fire Marshal's office has already launched a special education program to alert parents about the danger of toylike lighters.
- Oregon State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr and Oregon State Coordinator for Juvenile Fire Setter Intervention, Judith S. Okulitch, who have been so instrumental in championing awareness of toylike lighters, met with their state congressional delegation in April in Washington, DC. As a result, plans are underway to seek federal legislation to prohibit the sale of novelty lighters nationwide and to contact the Consumer Product Safety Commission to initiate a review of the sale of novelty lighters in the U.S.

NOTE: Several towns throughout the U.S. have also passed ordinances outlawing the retail sale of novelty lighters. See websites noted at the end of this article for more details



## Toylike Lighter Awareness & Legislation Grows (continued)

### Education

- The theme for the U.S. Fire Administration's May **Arson Awareness Week** was **Toylike Lighters – Playing with Fire.**
- In April, the National Association of State Fire Marshals, partnering with the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal and the US Fire Administration, created a display of toylike lighters on the National Mall in Washington, DC, capturing the attention of both legislators and tourists alike.

### Media

- BabyGooRoo.com, an online community where parents and health professionals share knowledge and access timely information, recently posted an article entitled, **“Novelty Lighters: The New Smoking Gun for Kids.”** Written by Pauline Lupercio, a freelance writer and blogger, the article discussed the dangers of toylike lighters.

If you are interested in the latest news about toylike lighters, visit the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal's website:

[www.oregon.gov/OSP/SFM/Novelty\\_Toylike\\_Lighters.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/OSP/SFM/Novelty_Toylike_Lighters.shtml) and the No Novelty Lighters Coalition's website: [www.nonoveltylighters.com](http://www.nonoveltylighters.com)

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