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# play safe! be safe!®

## BULLETIN



### Games Teach Serious Lessons

Wanda Omdahl wears many hats as Deputy Fire Marshal for the City of Albany Fire Department in Oregon. She teaches fire and life safety throughout the community, works with kids who set fires, and also heads the department's public information and community assistance programs. While she brings her training and talents of 13 years on the job to every aspect of her work, it's Albany's Elementary Education program that generates her greatest enthusiasm. It's through this education program that she comes in contact with children in grades K-5.

"What's most rewarding is seeing the children learn and retain the information that I'm teaching," says Omdahl. "I build on fire safety lessons as the children advance in age. When I visit the upper grades, I'm especially pleased that they remember the previous lessons."





"Ideally," concludes Omdahl, "we'd love teachers to reinforce fire safety lessons year round, but the reality is they have a lot to cover with the children." Oregon law mandates that fire safety must be taught once a month. For most schools that takes the form of a fire drill. Hopefully, the fire drill will remind students of some basic fire safety guidelines on a regular basis.

### **Games Teach Serious Lessons**

In reviewing the Health Belief Model, we are addressing the challenges of motivating parents and teachers to implement fire safety education and practices in their homes and classrooms. Last month we discussed what are termed "the benefits," i.e., concrete steps one can take to prevent fires, such as storing lighters out of reach and out of sight, and changing smoke detector batteries. The reality is, however, that taking positive action is easier said than done. Let's take a look at a few of the barriers with one of the easiest tasks: maintaining smoke detectors.

"Change your clocks; change your batteries." That's a simple enough adage to remember, but you also have to remember to buy replacement batteries. Or maybe you take the battery out of the detector late at night because it's chirping, or because it goes off every time there's something on the stove. You say to yourself, "I'll put it back later," but then forget.

Similarly, there are any number of barriers that prevent us from putting lighters and matches away, monitoring children's activities, and developing and practicing exit plans. But the biggest challenges seem to be overcoming fatigue and competing demands for our time, which wear down our vigilance.

We've all experienced that feeling of total exhaustion after a long day at work. All you want to do is sit, but you might have to make dinner, clean, get the kids to do their homework, to mention only a few things.

Parents have a limited amount of energy and tremendous demands on their time. They might see a lighter or book of matches out of the corner of their eye and subconsciously say: "I'll put that away in a minute." The best solution, which I mentioned in my last column, is to eliminate all but one ignition source. The key is recognizing the importance of these few life saving practices, setting priorities and following through, tired or not.

In my opinion, addressing these barriers is where the action is. We must each develop our own approaches to implement what we know to be life saving practices. We can make a difference in the number of lives we save and the number of injuries we prevent.

### ***'Tis the Season:***

#### **Fall/Winter Holidays: Prime Time for Candle Safety Lessons**

The majority of American's use candles in their homes, 77% according to the National Fire Protection Association. Beginning with Halloween and continuing through New Year's, 'tis prime candle season. For children, candles mean celebration. They are the bright lights on top of a birthday cake, the pretty decorations around the home, or the light inside a carved pumpkin.

What children do not comprehend is how volatile candles are. According to the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), 23,600 residential fires are caused by candles annually, which result in 1,525 civilian injuries, 165 fatalities and \$390 million in direct property loss.

Like toy-like lighters, children are naturally attracted to unusual candle shapes and colors. They have to be continually reminded: **keep away!**

As families begin the fall/winter holiday season, it's a perfect time to review these candle safety tips from the USFA:

- Keep candles out of the reach of children and pets
- Burn candles inside a 1-foot circle of safety, free of anything that can ignite
- Extinguish candles after use
- Use a sturdy metal, glass or ceramic candleholder
- Never leave a burning candle unattended.



**Fire Prevention Week - October 7-13**  
Practice Your Escape Plan

According to research conducted by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), 96% of Americans have a smoke alarm installed in their home, 66% have an escape plan, but 34% have not practiced it. NFPA is hoping to change that statistic with the focus on **Practice Your Escape Plan** during Fire Prevention Week.

To help raise community awareness, NFPA is staging the "Great American Fire Drill." They are working with fire safety educators and teachers nationwide to encourage children and their families to select a date during Fire Prevention Week, or sometime during October to practice their home exit plan. They are hoping for..."the world's biggest fire drill!"

As always, tools and information for educators and parents are available at NFPA's web site: [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org).