



Scarborough Fire Department Scarborough, Maine



Standard Operating Procedures

Book:	Organization
Chapter:	General Administration
Subject:	1235 – Juvenile Fire Safety Intervention Program
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Approved by:	<i>B. Michael Thurlow</i>

PURPOSE

To establish a comprehensive awareness, assessment, educational, intervention, and referral program for juveniles that have been involved with or who are at risk for fire setting or inappropriate fire safety behavior.

POLICY

The Scarborough Fire Department Fire Prevention Bureau shall maintain an active Juvenile Fire Safety (JVFS) intervention program that includes a cadre of trained and certified juvenile fire safety intervention specialists to administer the program outlined in the Purpose section of this policy.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Juvenile Fire Safety Intervention Program is to reduce fire-related tragedies through assessment, intervention and education.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

- A. To establish consistent procedures and protocols to follow when addressing inappropriate JVFS behavior.
- B. To raise awareness throughout the community of the dangers of JVFS activities and the availability of various forms of assistance and education for those juveniles that require it.
- C. For the department to be an active member of the Cumberland County and State of Maine Juvenile Fire Safety Collaborative to take advantage of the collaboration and resources available through the department of health and human services, mental health providers, the department of education, the department of corrections, and a variety of stakeholders.
- D. To develop and maintain a network of inter-agency cooperation, jointly addressing the problem and minimizing the risk associated with JVFS.

DEFINITIONS

- A. **Juvenile Firesetter** - Any child, youth or adolescent who engages in the act of burning/melting anything, (regardless of its value or of their intent) or, who plays with fire for curiosity or any other reason.
- B. **Juvenile Fire Safety Intervention Program** – A formal program consisting of six components designed to provide a continuum of interventions for any juvenile who comes to the attention of the department for inappropriate fire safety behaviors.
- C. **County Intervention Collaborative** - A network of professionals jointly addressing the problem and mitigating the risk associated with juvenile fire safety behavior within the County.
- D. **Multi-Discipline Team (MDT)** – A team of professionals consisting of representatives of agencies including fire, police, juvenile justice, social service, mental health, and education that review cases and make recommendations for the appropriate level of intervention(s) required.

PROCEDURE

The Juvenile Fire Safety Intervention Program is made up of the following six components:

- A. Identification
- B. Referral / Intake / Release of Information
- C. Screening and Safety Considerations
- D. Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Review
- E. Interventions and Education
- F. Evaluation and Follow-up

IDENTIFICATION

The point of entry into the JVFS program follows the identification of at-risk juveniles. The earlier the identification is initiated, the better the chances of successful intervention. Typically, juveniles can be referred from any source including: the fire service, parents, caregivers, schools, community agencies such as law enforcement, mental health, child protective services, and youth aid programs.

All companies are provided Form 1591 - JVFS Intake / Referral Form which is carried on the apparatus or can be found electronically in the Forms folder of the SOPs. It shall be the responsibility of the person in charge to fill out this form and forward it to the Duty officer when a juvenile is found to be the cause of a fire. The same form can also be used when families stop into a fire station and self-refer to the program. The Duty Officer will promptly forward the information to the Fire Chief's office.

It is important to note that under normal circumstances this program is not equipped to take immediate action in response to these referrals. The goal is to contact each family within 48 hours of identification or initiation of a referral. In situations where there is an urgent safety concern and immediate follow up is required the Chief on Call should be promptly notified.

REFERRAL / INTAKE / RELEASE OF INFORMATION

When a referral is made, the parent and/or legal guardian is required to sign a Release of Information (ROI) form granting the program the legal rights to collect and release information to those parties who need to be involved for a successful outcome of the case.

The program must have an intake process that includes the following five basic procedures:

- A. **Points of Entry** - where the juvenile makes initial contact with the program.
- B. **Reasonable Response Time** - the best window of opportunity is immediately after the fire.
- C. **Contact Person(s)** – trained JVFS intervention specialists available to take the case.
- D. **Record of Contact - Referral Form** – written or automated record of contact established for all cases. Along with the other information that will be collected, this form offers a descriptive account of the contacts and scheduling with the family. The value is often shown when a family refuses to participate and is referred back to the program again at a later date. The prior refusal is now documented and a paper trail is established.
- E. **Prioritization of Cases** – A method for responding to urgent cases that require a more rapid intervention.

SCREENING & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

A. Screening

The main component of the intervention process is screening. The purpose of a screening interview is primarily to gain information for the multi-disciplinary team (MDT) to use in making their determination regarding the type(s) of intervention(s) needed for a favorable outcome of the case.

The screening interview should be conducted in the home of the juvenile's family or guardian so that the interviewer(s) has an opportunity to experience the normal environment (living conditions) of the family. It will also help the juvenile being interviewed feel more comfortable and thereby potentially provide more information.

A pool of trained interventionists will perform the screening interviews. Only trained individuals working under the supervision of the Fire Chief are approved to provide this service. Any other employee encountering JVFS behavior will refer those juveniles to the program in accordance with these procedures.

The use of the structured screening tool often produces an understanding as to why the juvenile engaged in the use of fire or inappropriate fire safety behavior and may provide an indication of the likelihood or risk of continued fire setting behavior. Additionally, the screening tools are helpful in determining the proper course of action for intervention. The structured screening interview should be the only method of fact finding employed by the program for gaining information that will lead to appropriate intervention strategies established and initiated by the MDT.

The department's intervention specialists are only trained to identify and intervene by providing education to juveniles with mild curiosity of fire. Screening results that indicate a more serious problem requires referral to the MDT where additional and more in depth interviews and screening tools will be employed by professionals in the social service or mental health fields.

At the conclusion of the screening interview, the interviewer may assign some fire safety related responsibility to the child. If necessary, another meeting is scheduled to continue education.

Families will sometimes refuse to participate in the program. The most common reason is denial, on the part of the family, that their child was involved in the fire setting activity. Some parents also claim that the incident was isolated and the discipline provided by the family will remedy the situation. Regardless of the reason, all children brought to the attention of the program must be referred through the identified channels. Making a referral does not mean that negative actions or consequences will be directed toward the child and/or family. The program is designed to assist the family by providing solutions to the inappropriate fire safety behaviors.

B. Safety

At the time of the screening interview a home fire safety inspection should be conducted to assure a safe environment. The inspection should ensure the installation and proper operation of smoke detectors in each room of the home (except bath and kitchen), clear exit ways, and the reduction and elimination of obvious fire hazards. It should address the removal of combustible clutter, and reinforce fire prevention activities like securing matches and lighters, and developing a home escape plan.

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM (MDT) REVIEW

The multi-disciplinary team is comprised of professionals who are involved with those agencies and departments that are concerned with and/or may provide services to juveniles. It is the MDT's responsibility to periodically meet to review and evaluate each cases screening interview report and matters related to the case; and to identify the level of concern for each case and the best type of intervention(s) necessary to address the behavior. Minimal MDT composition should consist of representatives of the fire services, law enforcement, juvenile justice system, mental health services, school systems and a children and youth social service agency.

INTERVENTIONS AND EDUCATION:

The goal of the intervention is to determine the child's needs in response to the inappropriate fire use. For children whose behavior seems to stem from thinking errors or lack of information about fire outcomes, education is the most appropriate intervention. When the behavior seems to result from stress, crisis or dysfunction in the child's life, the required intervention services often need to extend to other professional service providers and practitioners.

Intervention strategies include the services provided after the interview/screening process. They are decided upon by the MDT and delivered by those departments and agencies designated for that function. For children in need of extended services, the program will assist the family in finding a program or agency best suited to the family's needs. This may range from mental health involvement, child protective services, interaction with school counselors, Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) screening, inpatient hospitalization for the child, to family counseling. Parenting classes may be another recommended intervention. The program has an established list of intervention strategies to facilitate services to families. While education would be considered another intervention strategy, it is typically the service best provided by trained fire service educators.

Education is perhaps one of the most critical parts of the Juvenile Fire Safety Intervention Program. When children have had an experience with fire, it is crucial that they gain an understanding of why their behavior was inappropriate. This involves pointing out their mistakes and identifying appropriate corrective action.

Many times, the parent may think they have offered direction to their child. The reality is that most have not. Parents visiting the program have usually attempted to educate their children about proper fire use by applying one or more of the following approaches:

- Instilling fear in the child
- Punitive measures only
- Ignoring the problem, fearing ideas will be put into the child's head
- Explaining unrealistic outcomes of fire setting behavior (e.g. if you play with fire, you will be killed; you will go to jail; etc.)

Rarely do parents, whose children experience problems with fire, give a detailed explanation of how and when fire should be used. This should be no surprise since many adults know little more than their children do about the realities of fire.

The program provides fire safety education as an integral part of the interview/screening process. The interventionist begins the educational process during the intake interview with the family. Intervention Specialists participate in an extensive training program to understand juvenile fire setting behaviors and systems approaches to solutions. They also become familiar with community organizations that can assist in the intervention process when educational intervention does not provide sufficient motivation to discourage future behavior.

The parents are an important part of the educational process. If a parent cannot accompany the child to the interview, the interview will not be performed. Exceptions to mandatory parental attendance will be made in the case of children who are in the custody of the State and/or whose caseworker feels education will be beneficial to their future placement in a foster home or residential facility.

EVALUATION/FOLLOW-UP

Exit from a firesetter intervention program follows the completion and/or adequate implementation of intervention(s) as directed by the MDT. Anyone who exits the program prior to the completion and/or adequate implementation of any intervention(s) fails the program. However, the most typical exit for juveniles is after education and/or referral to an appropriate intervention.

Once a person exits a program it is important that follow-up procedures take place. Follow-up is established so the youth and families understand that the firesetter intervention program will continue to be concerned about their welfare. Follow-ups generally occur four to six weeks after exit, with a secondary follow-up between six and twelve months after exit.

Follow-ups can be conducted in a number of different ways including telephone calls (most cost-effective and least time-consuming), written contacts, and visits. The content of the follow-up needs also to be considered and may include a standard set of questions.

Evaluation and follow-up is probably the most important aspect of the Juvenile Fire Safety Intervention Program. It is the compass that guides the program. The program employs a comprehensive follow-up component that not only questions recidivism, but also critiques its content and delivery. Program evaluation cannot only come from within. The individuals receiving the service must be allowed input as well. The success of the clients, not the opinion of the program management, determines the success of this program. The program also concludes by delivering the mandatory fire reporting information to the appropriate authorities.

RESPONSIBILITY

- A. All members are responsible to know about the department’s JVFS program and to refer cases to the program as they learn about them through contact at incidents or through voluntary referrals.
- B. JFVS Intervention Specialists are responsible to administer the program as outlined in this policy using the most current information, tools and forms approved by the State and County Collaborative.

REFERENCES

- A. State of Maine Juvenile Fire Safety & Intervention Protocol
- B. FEMA Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialist I and II: Leadership Student Manual