

Awareness Training - Juvenile Arson

Lines of Business: Property, General Liability

Risk Control Strategy/Key Issues: To provide awareness training for all staff to recognize potential juvenile arsonists.

Suggested Program Elements:

Juvenile arson is a widespread phenomenon that can affect any school district and community at any time. It costs schools and insurance companies millions of dollars annually and can dramatically interrupt the educational process. Arson is a crime of opportunity, and this information is intended to help reduce one aspect of an arsonist's opportunity.

- 1. Policy statement:** A general statement noting that the policy establishes the responsibility and accountability of management and the employees in how to recognize and report potential juvenile arson. The statement also outlines goals of the policy; specifically, teaching those involved how to recognize hazards that could cause a fire or loss of life in a school environment.
- 2. Employee Responsibilities:** Part of the training should include what is expected of employees. These responsibilities should include reporting all fires no matter how small; reporting observed fireplay by juveniles, to include having matches and lighters in their possession; and reporting all arson threats and rumors.
- 3. Faculty and Staff Training:** This training should be documented and cover the following:
 - Personality profiles of juvenile firesetters
 - How to interview juvenile firesetters and their families
 - How to use U.S. Fire Administration resources
 - How to classify firesetting risk for juveniles, and
 - Intervention techniques and resources.

Appropriate precautions to reduce the potential of substantial fire loss should also be discussed. These items include adequate building and security protection, proper housekeeping, proper storage, and routine inspections of buildings and grounds.

- 4. Response:** A fire prevention program is the first line of defense in preventing a fire from occurring. It is very important that management take all reports seriously and investigate all fires, especially small ones. All investigations should be documented with the date, time, location/site, witnesses, point of origin or item(s) burned, any injuries, property damage, and whether fire/police was contacted and who (or why not). Third-party statements, unsubstantiated rumors, or information that cannot be verified should not be documented. It is also a good idea to consult with the site administrator and local fire department liaison for assistance and a professional opinion. Also check to see if the "WeTip" or other anonymous crime reporting hotline posters are on display. If not, they should be put in place ASAP to assure that all lines of communication are open to the student body and community.
- 5. Discipline procedures:** Disciplinary action should follow the entity's approved disciplinary action policy. The action should be clear and consistent, measured (entity approved) based on seriousness of the incident, and documented. Keep all actions and juveniles involved confidential. Keep in mind that arson is a crime and should be treated as such. If the culprit is found, *do not* simply give them a "slap on the wrist"--get them help by enrolling them in a program specifically designed for firesetters. Most juvenile firesetters can be helped if the problem is spotted early.

- 6. Anonymous crime reporting hotline posters:** Assure that “WeTip” crime reporting hotline posters are posted in high-visibility areas and re-posted as needed if they become damaged or disappear. Routine monitoring should be in place to assure they remain posted.

WeTip is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to stamping out crime in schools and communities. Its concept is simple: They provide organizations with an anonymous, toll-free, multi-language hotline to distribute to residents and students who have information about a crime and want to report it to authorities without revealing their identity. The line is staffed 24/7. Also, callers can be eligible for rewards.

Please contact your Risk Control Representative for more details.

Program Activities Calendar:

- Annual training first quarter of fiscal or school year
- Student body assembly/orientation at beginning of school year
- Annually review all fire incidents and outcomes

Web Site Links:

- U.S. Fire Administration
<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/>
- National Fire Protection Association
<http://www.nfpa.org>

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