



# Arson Control Forum

<b>Topic</b>	Arson
<b>Title</b>	Juvenile Fire Setter Schemes
<b>Service</b>	Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service
<b>Region</b>	South West
<b>Date</b>	11/08/2010

## Issue

Arson is a growing problem, every week in the UK there are:

- 2,100 arson attacks,
- 1 - 2 people die in arson attacks,
- 55 people are injured and
- 20 schools are damaged or destroyed by arson.

Children and young people start to play with fire for various reasons, ranging from natural curiosity to attention-seeking. The reasons behind fire setting are vague and complex. Whatever the reason, juvenile fire setting magnifies the potential for a major accident and is a serious problem that cannot afford to be ignored. Without help and guidance, fire setting behaviour can increase and lead to more serious consequences such as personal injury and damage to homes, schools and property.

## Actions Taken

Wiltshire FRS's Fire Setter Intervention Scheme was designed to address fire setting behaviour amongst children and young people aged up to and including 17 years. Originally a team of advisors were trained to deal with children and young people who have demonstrated a fascination with fire. Since the scheme started in 1996 the Service's skilled advisors have visited over 530 young people in their homes. The scheme was set up because it was recognised that this was a way to help young people who were experimenting with fire, to help them understand the danger they were in and the potential damage that can happen. There had been a notable rise in deliberate fire setting in Wiltshire so this prompted the introduction of the scheme.

Young persons are referred to the scheme in numerous ways which include parental request, operational intervention by police crews as a result of an incident and youth offending teams or a referral from school. Working with partnership agencies such as the police is an important part of the scheme.

## What were the objectives?

1. To engage with young people and their families.
2. To provide fire safety education to young people and their families working towards the referred young person becoming fire safe.
3. To educate young people in fire safety skills and responsible citizenship.
4. Ensure WFRS Staff working with children and young people are effective and professional.
5. Identify and disseminate good working practice

Like many experts - Wiltshire FRS agrees that the best way to understand firesetting behaviour is to look at where and why children set fires. We see children who fall into two groups.

**Curiosity Firesetters** usually are children 3-7 years old whose fascination with fire leads them to "play" with it to find out how it feels, how it burns and what it does. They do not understand fire's destructive potential. Although curiosity is a normal part of children's growth and development, parents and other adults who discover that a child is playing with fire out of curiosity, should take it very seriously.

**Problem Firesetters** can also be very young, but generally are 5-17 years of age. In contrast to the curiosity firesetter, these young people light fires because of emotional or mental disturbances that can range from mild to severe. A crisis in the child's life, such as moving to a new area, a divorce, or a death in the family, can trigger firesetting behaviour. Chronic behaviour problems, such as a poor relationship with other children, cruelty to animals and extreme mood changes are a few of the traits that problem adolescent firesetters have revealed.

In addition to Home visits, alternative agreed places can be arranged. The number of visits depends on the individual case and family circumstances. Parents and guardians are also offered advice on how to best stop the firesetting.

## Summary of Benefits Realised

By working in partnership with the police, small incidents of fire setting that WFRS did not attend have been brought to their attention.

Groups who have been involved in these incidents have been spoken to by WFRS about the consequences of their actions. It has been explained arson can lead to injuries or fatalities, criminal prosecution in some cases and also have a huge impact on the futures of everyone involved.

The Juvenile Firesetters Intervention Programme is an integral part of our education strategy. Recognising that some young people require a more intensive programme. The resources used vary depending on the age and ability of the child or young person and the individual details of each case. One of the strengths of the Juvenile Firesetters Intervention Programme is recognising the role of the Fire and Rescue Service and its limitations. For this reason we are continually developing strong links with relevant partner agencies who have their own areas of expertise to improve our assessment process and facilitate forward referrals.

## Contact

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