

For Immediate Release
Alaska Department of Public Safety
State Fire Marshal's Office

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Arson Awareness Week

May 4th through May 10th 2008 is "*Arson Awareness Week*", and this year's national theme is "**Toy Like Lighters: Playing With Fire**". Novelty lighters have become a serious problem throughout the country because of their toy like appearance. These lighters mimic common household items as well as children's toys. Many attract small children with their visual effects, flashing lights, and sounds. These lighters are not required to have child safety features like a standard lighter. Novelty lighters have been responsible for deaths, injuries, and property loss throughout the United States. Alaska State Fire Marshal David Tyler joins several other states in an effort to pass legislation banning the sale of novelty lighters.

Above and beyond the novelty lighter issue, Alaska is seeing an alarming increase in fires started by young children playing with matches and lighters. In Anchorage, a five year old boy lost his life in a fire that was started when children were playing with a lighter. Three months later in the village of Alakanuk, a sixty-four year old man died in a fire started by a four year old playing with a lighter. Three days later in the village of Wales, a five year old boy was playing with a lighter and destroyed his home. His father was injured in the fire.

Alaskans need to step up and protect these precious kids from the devastation of fire. Young children are curious and don't understand the destructive potential of fire. Many times they are not supervised and the matches and lighters are within their reach. The following safety tips can help protect our children.

- Teach young children that fire is a tool, not a toy.
- Keep matches and lighters out of reach, in high, ideally locked, cabinets.
- Supervise young children.
- Ask young children to tell you when they find matches and lighters, and put them away.
- Teach older children proper techniques for using fire and fire tools.
- Praise your child for practicing responsible behavior and showing respect for fire.
- Set a good example: use matches, lighters, and fire carefully.

Fire safety should be a community effort. The following are tips that the entire community can support to protect its children.

- Prevent curiosity firesetting in the first place by providing fire and life safety education for children throughout the year.
- Organize and coordinate community-based screening, assessment, and intervention programs.
- Identify and provide for the child's and family's needs (fire safety education, counseling, social services, etc.) using community resources.
- Assist parents/caregivers and all who work with children to better understand children's involvement with fire, along with when and where to go for help.