

## Juvenile Fire Setter Overview

A fire is reported every three and a half hours in Texas as a result of children playing with fire, matches or other fire starter tools.

More people die in fires than in hurricanes, earthquakes, floods and all natural disasters combined. Over half of all arson cases involve preteens. Fires set by preteens kill hundreds of people each year and destroy millions of dollars of property. Firefighters, fire setters and other innocent victims die in these fires.

The first step in solving the juvenile fire setter problem is to better understand which children set fires and why they do it. Juvenile fire setters generally fall into four categories. These categories are explained below.

### Curiosity / Experimental Fire Setters

- Boys and girls ages 2 to 10
- Lack understanding of the destructive potential of fire
- Easy access to lighters, matches or other fire starting tools
- Unsupervised

### Troubled / Crisis Fire Setters

- Mostly boys of all age
- Have usually set two or more fires
- Use fire to express emotions such as anger, sadness, frustration or powerlessness concerning stress or other major changes in their life
- May not understand the consequences of uncontrolled fire
- Most likely will continue to set fires until needs are met or identified
- Known as "cry for help" fire setters

### Delinquent / Criminal Fire Setters

- Usually teens with a history of fire setting, gangs, truancy, drug / alcohol use and abuse and other antisocial behavior
- Fires are set with intent to destroy or as acts of vandalism and malicious mischief
- Targets are typically schools, open fields, dumpsters or abandoned buildings
- Crimes may involve restitution and criminal punishment

### Pathological / Emotionally Disturbed Fire Setters

- Involves a psychiatric diagnosis
- Fires may be random, ritualized or with specific intent to destroy property
- Chronic history of school, behavioral and social/emotional problems
- Boys and girls of all ages
- Set multiple fires