
Youth Firesetter Referrals

409.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide district personnel with resources for helping youth firesetters and their families receive the help they need through education, diversion, assessment and psychological services, in cooperation with local nonprofit organizations.

409.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Fresno County Fire Protection District to participate in a coordinated effort with local nonprofit organizations and local government agencies to provide appropriate referral or treatment services to youth from this jurisdiction.

409.3 PROCEDURE

Entry into a youth firesetter program may be recommended by district personnel following a request from parents, guardian or caregivers or as a result of a fire incident. There are four types of referrals:

409.3.1 CAREGIVER REFERRALS

Parents or guardians who call the Fresno County Fire Protection District for assistance will be directed to a member trained in youth firesetter intervention. When possible, telephone contact should be made with the parents within 48 hours of the District being contacted. Parents should be provided with information about the program options and should be encouraged to make an appointment with the district's Fire Prevention personnel. A pre-interview form should be completed during the telephone contact.

409.3.2 WALK-IN REFERRALS

If someone comes to a fire station with a child who may be involved with firesetting, that person should be referred to Fire Prevention. If no Fire Prevention personnel are available, a pre-interview form should be completed during the walk-in contact and forwarded to the Fire Prevention Bureau. When appropriate, a Fire Prevention member should be contacted to advise of the walk-in contact and sent information regarding the youth firesetter.

409.3.3 FIRE DEPARTMENT REFERRALS

If a youth firesetter is identified at a fire scene, the Incident Commander (IC) should complete a youth firesetter referral form. The form should be forwarded to the Fire Prevention Bureau. The IC should be contacted by the Fire Prevention Bureau confirming the receipt of the referral form and advising what action is being taken with the youth and his/her family.

If evidence at a fire scene indicates a youth started the fire, the IC must contact law enforcement and report this involvement in a fire incident report. The report should indicate that:

- The person involved in the ignition of the fire was a child or a person under the age of 18.

Youth Firesetter Referrals

- The fire was a result of a child experimenting with fire or arson.
- The information known about the youth (e.g., name, age, sex, address).
- The parent or guardian information, if known.

A copy of the report should be sent to the Fire Prevention Bureau.

The IC should call a fire investigator any time there is evidence of arson, when there are witnesses with information that could identify the youth firesetter or when the suspect is still at the scene.

A youth who has been referred to the District by the juvenile justice court will be assigned to a member of the Fire Prevention Bureau. If the youth fails to attend any mandated program sessions, the Fire Prevention member should notify the court or the youth's probation officer. If the youth successfully attends all required sessions and completes the program, the Fire Prevention member should send a program completion letter on district letterhead to the youth's probation officer.

409.4 PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The following components should be included in any youth firesetter program. Depending on the individual situation, some of the steps may not apply.

Assessment - The first step is generally a family interview including a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assessment at a location designated by the Fresno County Fire Protection District. Assessments may be conducted at the child's home or living environment of the child and family members are encouraged to attend.

Diversion - Diversion is a process that allows the child to complete all or some of the program after which a citation can be dismissed or not processed. For admission into diversion, the youth will undergo a criminal background check. A parent or legal guardian and the child must attend a diversion hearing, where the child will be asked to describe behaviors and to answer questions to assess whether the child is at risk of repeating his/her offense. The child's parents or legal guardians and the child may be asked to sign a contract that requires specific actions to qualify the child for continued participation in the firesetter program. When the child successfully completes the program the District will process a request to dismiss the citation.

Educational intervention - In this step families attend a fire safety academy. It is recommended that all family members attend. Academies may be conducted several times throughout the year and child/family placement is subject to availability. Academies should be broken into age-appropriate classes for the youth. Informational training seminars should be included for parents and guardians.

Counseling - The District may recommend family counseling. If a child and family have been referred to counseling, it is strongly recommended that the counseling occur concurrently with academy attendance. A list of local organizations and resources should be provided to the family.

Youth Firesetter Referrals

Behavioral update - After completing the academy and/or counseling, a representative from the firesetter program may follow up with adults in the child's home to discuss the child's behavior and review any progress.

The Fire Prevention Bureau should produce regular reports specific to youth firesetters and outcomes. Reports should be included in district training programs as part of awareness and disposition outcomes.