



## When it comes to fire, a child's room doesn't have to be such a deadly place.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), "Young children are at particular risk of death in fire, with kids ages five and under twice as likely to die in a fire as the rest of the population."<sup>1</sup> At home, children usually play with fire in "secret" places like their bedroom, where they are not likely to be observed. Bedrooms typically contain a lot of things that can easily catch fire.<sup>2</sup>

We know how to prevent serious fires in children's bedrooms. Parents must and can do more, but they can't do it alone. Together, we can stop fire from doing its deadly work. Let's give fire a timeout.

### What national statistics tell us

**About children playing with fire** Juvenile firesetters are classified in different ways, ranging from those children (often under age 8) who set fires out of curiosity or accidentally, to those children (often older than age 8) who are motivated by psychosocial conflict or criminal intent. Children under 19 account for more than half of *all* arson arrests, although the vast majority of fires ignited by children do not result in arrests. Fires set by children playing in residences are more deadly, on average, than other types of residential fires, according to the US Fire Administration (USFA).<sup>3</sup> One-third of the fires that kill kids are set by children playing with fire.<sup>4</sup>

**About candles** According to the USFA, "The explosive growth of the candle industry parallels the annual increase of candle fires – an average of 9,400 fires, \$120.5 million in losses, 90 deaths, and 950 injuries ... 45% of candle fires originate in the bedroom, 41% of candle fires are from either unattended candles or candles placed too close to combustibles."<sup>5</sup> The NFPA reports that "Children under five faced the highest risk of death from candle fires."<sup>6</sup>

**About electrical fires** According to the USFA, "Home electrical problems account for 67,800 fires, 485 deaths, and \$868 million in property losses."<sup>7</sup>

**Home electrical wiring** may be a problem in any room of a house – including a child's bedroom – and according to the USFA "causes twice as many fires as electrical appliances."<sup>8</sup> Many avoidable electrical fires can be traced to misuse of electric cords, such as overloading circuits, poor maintenance and running the cords under rugs or in high traffic areas.

The **home appliances** most often involved in electrical fires are electric stoves and ovens, dryers, central heating units, televisions, radios and record players.<sup>9</sup>

Children's bedrooms are unlikely to contain stoves, dryers and heating units, but they commonly contain televisions, radios, CD and DVD players, and especially video gaming devices, which are among the consumer electronics industry's most successful new products.<sup>10</sup>

### **About flammable stuff in kids' rooms**

Candles, kids playing with matches and electrical defects are only half the problem. Certain products commonly found in children's bedrooms are easily ignited and highly flammable. The national fire data typically lags by several years but mattresses, bedding and upholstered furniture head the list of highly flammable products in the home.<sup>11</sup> Some entertainment and computer equipment have been shown to present a risk from fire both from external (candles, lighters, etc.)<sup>12</sup> and from internal sources due to product defects.<sup>13</sup>

### **What common sense tells us**

**Common sense tells us that preventing fires in children's rooms is a priority, a big job but achievable if we all work together.**

### **What parents can do**

Common sense tells us that, especially with young children, parents must do their best to supervise kids. But the most attentive parent cannot be with their children every minute, and single parents often find it difficult to spend adequate time with their children. Even when they are not physically present, parents can do a lot to make their children's rooms safer from fire. Parents can:

- Keep candles, lighters and matches away from their children.
- Look for the early signs that a child may have an abnormal fascination with fire. Mere curiosity can and often does turn into intentional fire-setting as children grow older. If you suspect a problem with your child, immediately contact your local fire department for assistance.
- Install smoke alarms in hallways and in every bedroom per manufacturers instructions -- and keep them in working order. Smoke alarms save lives.
- Be a smart shopper. Fire-resistant mattresses, upholstered furniture, computers, TVs, video games and other common products are now available. Parents should ask about the fire safety of a product prior to purchase.
- Develop an escape plan and practice it as a family.

Also, know when to seek help if you suspect a child is setting fires. Curiosity about fire is normal in a child. Firesetting behavior is not. A good first step is to contact local or state fire officials for guidance.

## What manufacturers and retailers can do

Common sense and ethical practice dictate that manufacturers take responsibility for the safety of their products and inform consumers if a potential fire risk exists.

Fortunately, many manufacturers care deeply about the safety of their products. But in a day when cheaply made imports are flooding the American market and the pressure is on to cut costs at every level, some products clearly are safer than others. Consumers need to be educated about a specific fire hazard to be able to protect against it.

Common sense and ethical practice also dictate that retailers take the time to learn the differences among the products they sell, and help their customers make informed choices about which products provide adequate levels of safety.

## What your local fire official or State Fire Marshal can do

If you have a question, a concern or an idea about preventing fires in children's rooms, contact the fire educators at your local fire department or your state's office of the State Fire Marshal. If you need help tracking down someone to help, contact us at [info@firemarshals.org](mailto:info@firemarshals.org).

If you cannot afford a smoke alarm, ask for help from your local fire department or State Fire Marshal. Fire officials may not be able to satisfy every request immediately, but they will try their best in every case.

Let local fire officials or your State Fire Marshal's office know immediately if you are worried about a child's interest in fire. They can direct you to programs and professionals who can help address your concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> "Fire Smarts!" RiskWatch, National Fire Protection Association, available at <http://www.nfpa.org/RiskWatch/topfireburn.html>

<sup>2</sup> "Bedroom Fire Safety Helps You Sleep Sound at Night: A Factsheet on Bedroom Fire Prevention," US Fire Administration, March 2006, available at <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/safety/tips/bedroom.shtm>.

<sup>3</sup> "Children and Fire," Topical Fire Research Series, Volume 1, Issue 6, US Fire Administration, December 2001, available at <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/tfrs/v1i6-508.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> "Bedroom Fire Safety," <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/safety/tips/bedroom.shtm>.

<sup>5</sup> "Candle Fires in Residential Structures," Topical Fire Research Series, Volume 1, Issue 12, US Fire Administration, February 2001 (Rev. December 2001), available at <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/tfrs/v1i12-508.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> "Home Candle Fires," Marty Ahrens, Fire Analysis and Research Division, National Fire Protection Association, August 2005, available at <http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files/PDF/Candlereport.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> "On the Safety Circuit: A Factsheet on Home Electrical Fire Prevention, US Fire Administration, March 2006, available at <http://usfa.fema.gov/safety/tips/electrical.shtm>

<sup>8</sup> "On the Safety Circuit," <http://usfa.fema.gov/safety/tips/electrical.shtm>

<sup>9</sup> "On the Safety Circuit," <http://usfa.fema.gov/safety/tips/electrical.shtm>

<sup>10</sup> For a recent assessment of video game equipment sales, visit [http://retailindustry.about.com/od/seg\\_toys/a/bl\\_npd012703.htm](http://retailindustry.about.com/od/seg_toys/a/bl_npd012703.htm)

<sup>11</sup> 1999 Revised 2002 Residential Fire Loss Estimates, US Consumer Product Safety Commission, November 2005, available at <http://www.cpsc.gov/LIBRARY/fire02.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> In light of the risk of external ignitions of computer and consumer electronics equipment, the International Electrotechnical Commission has completed most of the work on a candle ignition technical specification for use by manufacturers.

<sup>13</sup> For listings of product recalls related to fire hazards, visit <http://www.cpsc.gov/cgi-bin/recalldb/prod.asp>