

Arson Prevention

August 2010

While fires at school facilities can comprise a significant portion of a district's claims, there are effective methodologies that can be employed to mitigate the occurrence of fires, as well as their impact, should they still occur. First it is important to acknowledge some facts related to fires.

- More than 50% of all fires are set by children under the age of 18.
- 81% of school structure fires are caused by arson.
- 75% percent of school fires occur after school hours on weekends.

Typically, fires are started in bathroom trashcans or exterior trashcans placed too close to buildings, with trash dumpsters being the most commonly utilized exterior trashcan for fires. These areas are common to the initiation of intentionally set fires as a direct result of the fact that constant adult supervision is not typical in these areas. While fatalities from school fires are rare, resulting injuries from school fires are more frequent than all non-residential structure fires.

There are effective steps that can be taken to minimize the frequency and severity of school fires. One of the most effective measures is to have all trash picked up before the weekend. Trash accumulation over the weekend creates a prime opportunity for arsonists.

NCR ARSON/FIRE FACTS

NCR Claims 7/01/09- 6/30/10	Fire Claims Reported	Cost Incurred	% of \$ Paid	
Arson:	30	\$5,061,360	81%	32%
Accidental:	8	\$1,222,296	19%	8%
Total Fire:	38	\$6,283,656	-	40%
Total All Claims:	406	\$16,067,401	-	-

Reduce the opportunities and scope of potential damage: Arsonists seldom bring combustible items with them; they tend to use what is available on site. Reduce combustible access and storage levels whenever possible. Have security personnel remain visible and mobile. Ensure that doors and windows are secured and lockable. Fences, gates and external lighting prove to be a good deterrent. Trash containers, including recycling bins, should be placed in a secure compound or secured by a padlock and chain to a post sited **no less than 20 feet** from the building to prevent them from being moved against the building. Reduced opportunity and severity equates to reduced claims reported and costs, and in turn results in **reduced insurance rates.**

Subrogation Reality: Although parents are vicariously liable for the acts of their children and can be required by statute to repay the District as much as \$35,000.00 per child, this is a comparatively small recovery considering the large losses arson claims incur. To date, NCR has received zero recovery for arson claims.

EDUCATION

- Staff should be made aware of the potential for daytime fires to occur.
- Parents should be notified of all fire occurrences at their children's school, and informed if arson was the cause or suspected.
- Fire Safety Awareness sessions, including the risks of malicious calls, provided by the local fire service should be held at regular intervals for all children.
- Regular fire drills should be practiced and records of each drill documented.
- Children should be regularly informed that lighters and matches are not allowed in schools. Any breach should be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.
- Teachers should consider integrating fire issues and risks into daily school life.
- All fires, no matter how small, should be reported to the Fire Department.

PREVENTION

- New schools should be designed and built with arson in mind (e.g., closets should be constructed with fire resistant walls, ceilings with self-closing fire doors, etc.).
- Keep all supplies containing combustible materials in and around the school in a locked cabinet.
- Storages containing chemicals and hazardous materials, often adjacent to chemistry storerooms, should be well managed, clean and kept locked. The Fire Department should be advised of the location of such rooms for their records.
- Trashcans should be placed away from buildings, preferably in locked compounds.
- Recycling bins should be located at least 20 feet from buildings in secure enclosures, and collections made regularly to avoid a build up.
- Coats and other combustibles should not be kept in corridors or escape routes.
- Fire doors should be maintained in good working order and closed at all times.
- Automatic detection and fire alarm systems should be connected to audible alarms for constant monitoring and immediate transmission of a fire alarm signal to the local fire authority whenever the school is unoccupied.

- Do not leave flammable materials near candles or heat sources. Never leave candles in classrooms unattended.
- Dispose of old furniture properly.
- Close all doors at night, in an effort to contain any fire or smoke within the room of origin, or at the very least, slow down the rate of fire growth.

A trashcan was pushed up against the wall and lit with matches



Unknown perpetrators entered this unlocked classroom and found paper on the walls as an easy means to arson

RESOURCES

Safe Schools

http://www.aasa.org/issues_and_insights/safety/index.htm

American Association of School Administrators list of resources on safe schools.

Hazardous Materials in Schools

http://www.edfacilities.org/rl/hazardous_materials.cfm

(National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, Washington, DC)

NCEF's resource list of links, books, and journal articles regarding the identification, treatment, storage, and removal of hazardous materials found in school buildings and grounds.

Fire Safety in Schools

http://www.edfacilities.org/rl/fire_safety.cfm

(National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, Washington, DC)

NCEF's resource list of links, books, and journal articles providing an extensive overview of resources on fire safety issues in school buildings.

School Facilities Management

http://www.edfacilities.org/rl/facilities_management.cfm

(National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, Washington, DC)

NCEF's resource list of links, books, and journal articles on equipment, budgeting, and staffing methods used in the management of K-12 school buildings and grounds and college and university campuses.

National School Safety Center

<http://www.nssc1.org>

A national clearinghouse for school safety program information funded by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, and housed at Pepperdine University.