



HOT ISSUES

Comments about novelty lighters by a burn survivor and fire safety advocate

By Delores Lekowski

Do adults need or even want cigarette lighters to look like toys? Cigarette lighters are a source of ignition and not a source of playtime, so why should they look like cars, motorcycles, ladybugs, dinosaurs, dogs, cameras and numerous other eye-catching and child-pleasing designs in vibrant colors?

What age group are these lighters targeting?

Why are the manufacturers making lighters attractive to children?

Make no mistake. This is not a marketing issue. This is a fire safety issue. These fun-looking lighters can cause injury, death and destruction of property.

Anything with wheels seems to attract young children and many lighters use a small wheel rolled with a thumb for ignition. (Ed. note: Novelty lighters may integrate the ignition device into the

lighter's design by making a part of the lighter moveable.)

A firefighter at the Tennessee Public Fire and Life Safety Association's annual meeting pointed out to me that even child-resistant lighters can be ignited if they are pushed along the floor. Isn't this exactly what a child does with something that has at least one wheel, such as a lighter has?

If the child is pushing the lighter along on a bed, carpet, upholstered furniture, or some other flammable object, the consequences can be dire. This is frightening, but it is even more frightening when you think that the dangerous item has been disguised as a nonthreatening toy.

Recently, I was standing in line at a check out counter. I am sure you have noticed the items

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"I just don't understand the concept behind manufacturing an ignition device to look like a safe, non-threatening product. I have never seen harmful liquids in containers made to look like a car, so why make a fire-producing device look like one?"

arranged there, which the store hopes that you will buy on impulse while waiting in line. These impulse items have created many unhappy children as their mothers tell them to return the items they have grabbed from the shelves.

On this particular occasion, I was standing in front of a mother and her child. The child leaned over from her seat in the cart and picked up an item that looked like a toy cell phone. She asked her mom if she could have it, and, not paying much attention to her daughter, the mother continued to put her items on the conveyor belt. Her mother asked her what it was, and her daughter said a toy cell phone. Without looking she said yes to her daughter.

But the “toy cell phone” wasn’t a toy — it was a cigarette lighter! I watched as the little girl tried to rip open the package.

I asked myself, should I say something? I did not think the mother knew her daughter had a lighter in her hands. As I was paying for my purchases, I noticed the mother took the cell phone lighter from her daughter, and I sighed with relief until I heard her tell her tearful daughter that she could have it back as soon as the cashier rang it up! I visualized this mother putting her daughter into her car seat with her new “toy” to occupy her while her mother loaded her trunk. That’s when I knew I had to say something. I turned to the mother and said kindly, “You know, that little cell phone isn’t a toy — it’s a lighter.”

She picked it up and said, “OH MY GOD! I thought it was a toy!” Then she became upset. “I can’t believe they made this to look like a toy,” she said. “Thank you for saying something!”

Today I had to pick up something at a convenience store near me, and sitting at the end of the checkout counter was a display box with lighters made to look like a small toilet. I have no idea why anyone would want one, but judging from the half-empty display box, they obviously appeal to some people. I picked up the lighter and noticed it didn’t have any wrappings or warnings around it — it was ready to use. If a child picked it up without his mother noticing, he could light it without any

problem, since these lighters don’t seem to come with a child-resistant mechanism. And if you don’t think that children are interested in potties and enjoy their share of toilet humor, then you haven’t been around a young child for a while!

I heard another story about a child’s birthday party at which the goodie bags contained a small action figure the parents had purchased at the local dollar store. Unbeknownst to the parents, the action figure turned out to be a lighter. I don’t know any more about the story than that, but I only hope that none of the kids ended up starting fires and that the parents of every child at the party were contacted as soon as the problem was discovered.

It is important to remember that child-resistant features are meant to deter kids only up until about age five. After that — and in the case of some kids, even before — they can figure out how to defeat the mechanism, and they have the strength and manual dexterity to do it.

The rule with anything harmful to children is to keep it out of their reach. This rule should apply in stores also.

I just don’t understand the concept behind manufacturing an ignition device to look like a safe, nonthreatening product. I have never seen harmful liquids in containers made to look like a car, so why make a fire-producing device look like one?

Lighters and matches have always been a fire threat in the hands of children. My children were raised with the knowledge that these items were not toys and they should never touch them. Now we have novelty lighters made to look like toys and parents have to tell their children these are not toys they are just made to look like toys! This explanation must be very confusing for small children! If you are a parent with small children, DO NOT buy these lighters! Even if you don’t have children and you have one of these lighters please, keep it out of a small child’s reach. Safer yet, don’t buy them at all!

Delores Lekowski is a burn survivor and fire safety advocate. She is the author of *The Hurting Angels* and *The Power Angels*, books for young burn survivors..



Lighters or purses?



Start a car or start a fire?



Lighter or battery?



Why?

Lighter action around the world

Europe

Bic Corporation launches lighter information Web site

Lighter manufacturer BIC has launched a new Web site providing retailers in the UK with all the necessary information required to fully understand the implications of the European Decision regarding lighter safety.

The Web site, www.childresistantlighters.co.uk, provides a guide to new legislation on lighters and the significant impact it will have on retailers. Two new documents fully explain the new requirements: the *BICareful Newsletter* and the *BIC Trade Leaflet*.



Newsletter
BICareful™
May 2007
BIC

New legislation on lighters

- Why a European decision on lighters?
- What are the main requirements of the European decision?
- What are the consequences for you and your business?



IMPORTANT INFORMATION
A child-resistant lighter is not a child-proof lighter. A child-resistant lighter is a lighter that at least 85% of children under 51 months of age cannot operate. This means that up to 15% of children may still be able to operate such a lighter. Therefore adults should always ensure that young children cannot get hold of lighters, even if they are child-resistant.
As indicated on the European Commission website: http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_safes/prod_safes/lighters/index_en.htm

United States

U.S. cities nationwide are enacting novelty lighter ordinances

These cities passed ordinances banning novelty lighter bans this year. The Office of State Fire Marshal is posting ordinances on our Web site as we receive them. www.oregon.gov/OSP/SFM.

If your jurisdiction has passed, or is considering passing an ordinance banning novelty lighters, please let *Hot Issues* know.

National City, California

San Diego County
Effective date: June 1st

Redlands, California

San Bernardino County
Effective date: August 7th

North Little Rock, Arkansas

Effective date: October 1st

El Cajon, California

San Diego County
Effective date: September 13th

Vista, California

San Diego County
The first vote was taken on August 28 and passed four to one. The second vote is scheduled for September 11.

If passed, the ban would go into effect thirty-one days later on October 11.



Gumby, on the left, is shown with his doppelganger lighter above.

National Association of State Fire Marshals adopts resolution

The principal membership of The National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) approved a resolution in support of a ban on the sale and use of novelty lighters (printed on page 6) during their annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia, in July.

At the conference, John Dean, President of NASFM and State Fire Marshal of Maine, shared a personal story of a young boy who received burn injuries when he picked up a toylike lighter resembling a baseball bat thinking it was a flashlight.

Oregon State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr is grateful for the support of this highly respected national fire service organization in focusing attention on the dangers of toylike lighters at the national level.

The NASFM Executive Board encouraged the membership to submit any fire incidents involving a novelty lighter to the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM). The Oregon OSFM is willing to serve as the repository for data.

A short data collection form is available on our Web site, www.oregon.gov/OSP/SFM. Please help move this issue forward with Consumer Product Safety Commission by sharing incidents as you become aware of them.

Here are some recent incidents from across the country:

High Point, North Carolina: Six-year-old boy playing with a toylike lighter that resembled a cell phone caught his clothes on fire. The child sustained second degree burns.

Baltimore, Maryland: Three five-year-old girls using a gun-shaped lighter set playground equipment on fire.

Amity, Oregon: Three juvenile boys lighting a campfire with a toylike fishing pole lighter caught brush and trash on fire on school property.

Independence, Minnesota: A five-year-old found a lighter in his grandfather's novelty lighter collection and set bedding on fire.

Australian psychology student gains insight into Oregon juvenile firesetter intervention efforts

In June, Ph.D. and Masters student Kate McDonald visited Oregon as part of her research to evaluate the effectiveness of the juvenile firesetter awareness program of her home country of Australia.

Kate's whirlwind trip included visits to both community-based and state programs.

She visited the Fire Safe Children and Families program in Clackamas and Washington counties and observed two of the program's classes for firesetters. Classes are taught by a multidisciplinary team. Kate visited a SAFETY Class (ages twelve to seventeen) in Clackamas County and the Fire Academy for youths ages six to eleven in Washington County.

Kate's next stop was the Hillsboro Fire Department where Connie King shared Hillsboro's outreach to Hispanic families. Kate's home location has a significant aboriginal population, so outreach activities reaching across language and cultures was of interest to her.

Kate also spent time with Dr. Tim Kopet and Dr. Linda Nishi-Strattner discussing treatment issues.

At the state level, Kate visited Shirley Didier at the

Oregon Youth Authority to discuss the closed custody program Shirley has developed for incarcerated youths with firesetting issues. Kate spent a day at the Office of State Fire Marshal with Judy Okulitch, Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program Coordinator, to learn about Oregon's statewide program and the development and use of the Oregon *Juvenile with Fire* Screening Tool.

(Photo: Left, Judy Okulitch, Right, Kate McDonald)





RESOLUTION NUMBER 2007-2

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FIRE MARSHALS RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF BANNING THE SALE AND USE OF NOVELTY LIGHTERS

- WHEREAS,** The National Association of State Fire Marshals has contributed significantly to the preservation of life and property from fire; and
- WHEREAS,** The National Association of State Fire Marshals members consist of the most senior fire officials in the United States of America; and
- WHEREAS,** The members of the National Association of State Fire Marshals regularly find cigarette lighters being sold in their states that resemble toys and other objects that children find attractive; and
- WHEREAS,** The National Association of State Fire Marshals acknowledges that there have been fires and burn injuries resulting from children playing with so-called "novelty lighters" that resemble toys and other attractive objects; and
- WHEREAS,** The United States Fire Administration established an operational objective to reduce the loss of life from fire in the age group 14 years old and younger; and
- WHEREAS,** The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission has a strategic goal to reduce the rate of death from fire-related causes by 20 percent from 1998 to 2013; and
- WHEREAS,** The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission requires certain lighters to be child resistant, but not all lighters that children consider attractive are covered under these requirements; and
- WHEREAS,** The European Union recently required all cigarette lighters to be child-resistant, but at the same time recognized that novelty lighters have an inherently higher risk of misuse by children, and thus prohibited the sale of novelty lighters in the European Union as of March 11, 2007.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT, The National Association of State Fire Marshals encourages the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission to follow the European Union in banning the sale and use of novelty lighters that appeal to children; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, The National Association of State Fire Marshals encourages all fire service organizations and allied safety organizations to support this resolution to reduce the risk to life safety of our children.

This resolution was adopted by the membership assembled at the Association's Annual Conference in Atlanta, GA on July 11, 2007.

John C. Dean, President, NASFM

Editor's note: Printed below is the text of the North Little Rock ordinance. We are placing ordinances on the OSFM Web site because we are receiving so many calls for suggestions from other jurisdictions in the process of crafting their own resolutions.

North Little Rock, Arkansas

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING SECTION 46-82 OF THE NORTH LITTLE ROCK MUNICIPAL CODE TO ADD A SECTION FOR RESTRICTIONS ON NOVELTY LIGHTERS AND TO AMEND THE SECTION ON FIREWORKS; DECLARING AN EMERGENCY; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

WHEREAS, youth fire setting has been identified as a fast growing fire threat in the United States; and

WHEREAS, novelty lighters have features which are attractive to children, including visual effects, flashing lights, musical sounds and toylike designs (see Exhibits "A" and "B" attached hereto - Exhibit "A" depicting examples of toy designs and Exhibit "B" showing actual novelty lighters purchased in the City of North Little Rock); and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has recalled thousands of novelty lighters since 1996 due to the danger posed to public safety (see Exhibit "C" attached hereto); and

WHEREAS, functions of novelty lighters can be achieved without posing a danger to public health and safety; and

WHEREAS, many public safety agencies support the prohibition of the sale and distribution of novelty lighters; the National Fire Protection Agency, National Volunteer Fire Council, Western Fire Chiefs Association and the National Association of State Fire Marshals have lent their support to this issue; and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interest of the citizens and residents of the City that Section 46-82 of the North Little Rock Municipal Code be amended to add a section for the restriction of novelty lighters, and to amend the current section on fireworks.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORTH LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS:

SECTION 1: That Section 46-82 of the North Little Rock Municipal Code shall be amended to read as follows:

Novelty Lighters

(a) Prohibitions, inapplicability. The retail sale, offer of retail sale, gift or distribution of any novelty lighter within the territorial jurisdiction of the City of North Little Rock is prohibited. This prohibition is inapplicable to: (1) novelty lighters which are only being actively being transported through the city; or (2) novelty lighters located in a warehouse closed to the public for the purposes of retail sales.

(b) Definition. "Novelty lighter" means a lighter that has entertaining audio or visual effects, or that depicts (logos, decals, art work, etc.) or resembles in physical form or function articles commonly recognized as appealing to or intended for use by children ten years of age or younger. This includes, but is not limited to, lighters that depict or resemble cartoon characters, toys, guns, watches, musical instruments, vehicles, toy animals, food or beverages, or that play musical notes or have flashing lights or other entertaining features. A novelty lighter may operate on any fuel, including butane or liquid fuel.

(c) Exceptions. The term "novelty lighter" excludes: (1) any lighter manufactured prior to 1980; and (2) any lighter which lacks fuel or a device necessary to produce combustion or a flame.

(d) Enforcement. The provisions of this section shall be enforced by the fire marshal, any police officer, any code enforcement officer, and any other City official authorized to enforce any provision of the North Little Rock Municipal Code.

(e) Violation. Penalty. Any person or entity violating any provision of this section guilty of an infraction, and upon conviction therefor, shall be subject to a fine or penalty of not less than \$25.00 or more than \$500.00.



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Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program
4760 Portland Road NE
Salem, OR 97305-1760
www.oregon.gov/OSP/SFM

Outreach ideas on the toylike lighter issue



Staff at the Office of State Fire Marshal have been thrilled with the outpouring of support for the novelty lighter campaign. As you can see from this edition, communities are becoming proactive by banning toylike lighters locally, and not waiting for national legislation to stop their importation.

It has been suggested that instead of calling the lighters “novelty,” the wording “toylike” should be used instead. We think that’s a brilliant suggestion and are working hard to make the switch. “Toylike” cleverly sums up what the problem with the lighters is ... no lengthy explanation necessary.

Staff has also sent a copy of the poster shown at the left to the office of every pediatrician in the state of Oregon. We don’t know what the results of this effort will be, but are hopeful of reaching parents with small children and raising their awareness of the danger.

The poster is on our Web site in PDF format and anyone wishing to use it is invited to download it and have it printed.

Hot Issues is a quarterly newsletter of information and ideas for those concerned about juvenile firesetting. It is published by the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal. Please submit news, announcements, articles, suggestions or resources for review to *Hot Issues*. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this publication is available in alternate formats by calling 503.373.1540, ext. 240. Subscriptions are free of charge. Also available on the Office of State Fire Marshal Web site: www.oregon.gov/OSP/SFM/

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