

CANADIAN FIRE CHIEFS ANNOUNCE PILOT PROJECT TO LIMIT CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO LIGHTERS AND MATCHES

For Immediate Release

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, September 21, 2009 – A pilot project to limit the access that children have to lighters and matches was announced today by the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) at its annual conference in Winnipeg.

The project is a joint initiative between CAFC, Health Canada and The Arson Prevention Program for Children (TAPP-C), a program developed at the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH). The initiative aims to promote a voluntary prohibition on the sale of matches and lighters to minors through a program that mainly targets retailers, but also seeks to educate parents and care givers about the impact of fire-play on Canadian society

“Most recent statistics from 2001 show that 519 fires in Canada were caused by children playing with lighters and matches, resulting in 41 fatalities and 499 injuries involving young children, and almost \$10.5 million in property loss,” said Cambridge Fire Chief Terry Allen, who is leading this initiative on behalf of CAFC. “Fire Chiefs consider this pilot project to be an important approach to reducing fire-related injury and property damage, particularly because victims are the youngest and most vulnerable members of our communities,” he added.

“Arson and firesetting are significant public health and safety concerns. Individuals under age 16 play a prominent role in this problem, accounting for more than half of all fire related arrests,” said Dr. Sherri MacKay of the University of Toronto’s Department of Psychiatry, an expert on child arson, and Ontario Director of the TAPP-C Program. “This initiative could help reduce juvenile fire setting by reducing access to fire setting materials and influencing youth and community attitudes,” she said.

The lighters and matches initiative will be pilot tested in, Calgary, Cambridge, Dryden, Fort Erie, Kenora, Toronto, and Winnipeg, where fire department staff will ask retailers to voluntarily refuse to sell matches and lighters to minors. Retailers will be provided with stickers and posters to display in their stores as part of the public education program. A follow-up survey will assess the extent to which lighters and matches are displayed and/or easily accessible to children. A second survey will evaluate whether retailers have ensured that lighters and matches are out of the reach of children in their establishments. Results of the surveys will be analyzed to help the initiative partners determine the future course of action for the project.

“CAFC is encouraged by the support that Health Canada and the other proponents of the lighters and matches initiative have provided to address our concerns on this important issue. This pilot project will raise awareness of the impact that fire-play has on our society, and will provide valuable information regarding the current sales practices of lighters and matches to minors by Canadian retailers,” said CAFC President Bruce Burrell, Fire Chief of Calgary.

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