



Bureau of Indian Affairs Branch of Wildland Fire Management Youth Fire Intervention Program Questions and Answers

Why do kids set fires?

Youth-set fires are occurring across Indian Country at an alarming rate. The motivations behind these fire-setting behaviors are as diverse as the communities in which they are occurring. But the potential consequences are the same – endangering and even killing community members or themselves, destroying homes and community buildings, impacting the natural environment (including sources of revenue for their tribes) and damaging sites held sacred by their people.

When children set fires, it shows their lack of respect for the land, for their neighbors, and for themselves. Whether acting out of curiosity, boredom, anger or in response to a family crisis, youth need to be held accountable for actions to stop this dangerous behavior.

What is the goal of the program?

The program uses a multi-disciplinary coalition and restorative justice driven fire prevention, safety and survival curriculum to address the needs of the youth involved. The goal of this program is to help youth regain their self-respect and earn back the trust of their community by learning about the responsibility they have to protect their families, communities and natural resources.

How do we get a program started?

Initial communications focus on gaining Tribal Council support for the initiation of the program. The Regional BIA Wildland Prevention Specialist begins by meeting with the Tribal and/or BIA Fire programs to discuss fire occurrence data, desired outcomes and potential coalition partners. Once the Tribal Council signs a Resolution, a Youth Fire Prevention Coordinator will be dispatched to work with representatives from the Tribe to implement the Program.

What does the Youth Fire Intervention Program Coordinator do?

- Initially, the coordinator acts a facilitator for the coalition meetings.
- The coordinator provides initial training for all community members regarding the needs of youth misusing fire and the tools available to help them.
- The coordinator trains prevention specialists to screen youth to determine if the youth were involved in experimental fire setting or if the behaviors were a symptom of more serious personal or mental health issues that will require referral to and assistance from one of the coalition partners.
- The coordinator provides training on a comprehensive educational curriculum based on restorative justice models focused on fire issues.

How are youth referred into the program?

A referral to the program will be mandatory when the fire department, police, courts, probation, behavioral health or schools encounter youth engaged in misusing fire. This may originate from any of the above entities.

Voluntary referrals may also take place. This referral may come from a parent seeking to help instill the seriousness of fire-setting behavior in their child.