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Nation

Child fire deaths cut in half

Group credits smoke detectors, kid-proof lighters

By Frank Santiago
USA TODAY

A federal rule from 1994 requiring that cigarette lighters be made child-resistant has been followed by a dramatic drop in fire deaths and injuries among children, a research group said Wednesday.

Fires killed 125 children and injured 800 more last year. That's about half the number killed or injured five years earlier, the National Fire Protection Association says.

Although children make up a small portion of those killed or injured in fires, the decrease has helped make 1999 the safest year on record.

The association reported Wednesday that 3,570 people died in fires in 1999, an 11% decrease from 1998.

That decrease occurred even though the number of reported fires increased by 4% to 1.8 million, causing \$10 billion in damage.

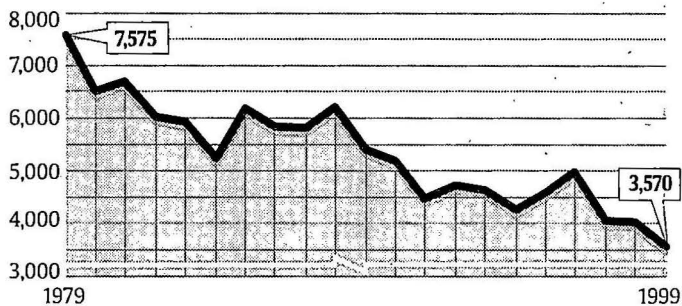
Association figures show that fire deaths in the USA have fallen almost steadily each year since counting began in 1977.

Fire deaths reached a peak of 7,710 in 1978.

John Hall, who heads research for the association, says the overall decline in fire deaths is connected to several developments, but it is due primarily to the wider use of

Fatalities plummet in past 2 decades

Deaths in fires have dropped dramatically the past 20 years. The annual number of fire deaths below excludes firefighters killed in the line of duty.



Source: National Fire Protection Association

By Quin Tian, USA TODAY

"The obvious explanation is smoke alarms. They have gone from a rarity to commonplace."

— John Hall,
National Fire Protection Association

smoke detectors.

"The pattern is that there has been a decrease in all sizes of communities. The obvious explanation is smoke alarms," he said. "They have gone from a rarity to commonplace."

Hall also links the decrease in child fire deaths and injuries to the child-resistant lighters.

"It has been a highly effective solution to an important part of the problem," he says.

Ken Giles, spokesman for the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which ordered child-resistant lighters, says lighters now require two steps to ignite, a maneuver

most children can't perform.

Hall says the new lighters also appear connected to a drop in child deaths and injuries caused by children playing with matches.

"It seems to be part of the whole business of parents being more sensitive to the dangers," he says.

In other news on the fire front, the National Fire-Protection Association reported:

▶ About 80% of all fire deaths are in the home.

▶ The Northeast had the highest regional rate of fire injuries per million people, the West the lowest.

▶ The number of vehicle fires dropped 3% in 1999 to 368,500.