



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE ISSUED: Sept. 5, 2007 REPORT NO: 07-139

ATTENTION: Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee
Agenda of September 12, 2007

SUBJECT: Prohibition of Sale and Distribution of Novelty Lighters

REFERENCE: N/A

SUMMARY

Children often mistake novelty lighters for toys due to the toy-like appearance and features of these lighters. As a result, children playing with novelty lighters inadvertently start fires that cause injury, death and property destruction. Despite lighter safety standards passed at the federal level, fires caused by children playing with novelty lighters continue to occur. To address this public safety concern, local government agencies across the nation have adopted ordinances that prohibit the sale and distribution of novelty lighters in their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Support the Mayor's proposal to introduce an ordinance banning the sale and distribution of novelty lighters and;
2. Direct the City Attorney to draft an ordinance for deliberation by the full council.

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is an independent federal regulatory agency whose primary mission is to ensure that consumer products are safe to use and will not cause injuries or death.

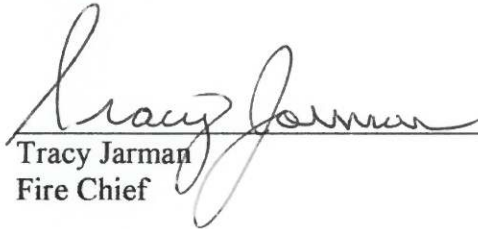
Under the 1994 Child Safety Protection Act, the CPSC has the authority to mandate safety standards and recall products that are considered dangerous. For example, to reduce deaths and injuries associated with children under age five who obtain and play with cigarette lighters, a mandatory safety standard was established requiring disposable and novelty lighters to be "child-resistant", meaning 85% of the children in a controlled test group must not be able to operate the lighters. As a result, thousands of dangerous lighters have been recalled to date.

Unfortunately, there has been a significant proliferation of novelty lighters that attract and fascinate children. Some of these lighters meet CPSC standards. While the child-resistant cigarette lighter standard has been highly effective, children cannot discriminate a toy from a fire tool that looks like a toy. These lighters mimic everyday toys found in the home, encouraging children to play with these dangerous lighters. Many of these lighters have flashing lights and make sounds, which make the lighters more attractive to children. Juvenile fire setting has been identified as the fastest growing fire threat in the United States and annual statistics show that more than 300 people are killed and nearly one-billion dollars in property is destroyed by fires set by children. Over 30% of the victims from these fires are the children themselves. Accidents caused by lighters are the 2nd leading cause of death in children 14 years of age and under.


These lighters pose a serious risk and represent a major threat to public safety. Placed in the hands of children, it is a recipe for disaster. Therefore, the Mayor has directed the Fire-Rescue Department to work with the City Attorney's Office to develop an ordinance that would control the sale of novelty lighters to ensure children are not placed in harms way.

RECOMMENDATION

Support the Mayor's proposal to introduce an ordinance banning the sale and distribution of novelty lighters and direct the City Attorney to draft an ordinance for deliberation by the full council.



Tracy Jarman
Fire Chief



Jill Olen
Deputy Chief Operating Officer
Public Safety/Homeland Security