

Program takes fire out of child's play

BY ANDY COMBER

Essex firefighters welcome every opportunity to let the public know about a program that teaches children about the dangers of playing with fire.

"It is known as TAPPC, the arson prevention program for children," said Randy Reaume, a Station No. 2 Captain with the Essex Fire and Rescue Services.

"It helps families deal with children and teens involved in fire play or fire setting," said Reaume, who has taken part in the program since it was adopted by the Essex fire department about eight years ago.

Reaume said it is common for children to become fascinated by fire - often at an early age - however, some children develop an extreme fascination with fire, leading to fire play and fire setting.

"That is when it becomes a problem," he said.

The TAPPC program is shaped around different age

groups, for children ages 2 to 5, 6 to 8, 9 to 12, and 13-17.

"It is a proactive instead of reactive program," said Reaume, explaining how the TAPPC program begins with a visit to the child's home where fire-fighters conduct a fire safety audit.

"Sometimes matches or lighters are left out - it has just been a curiosity thing," he said.

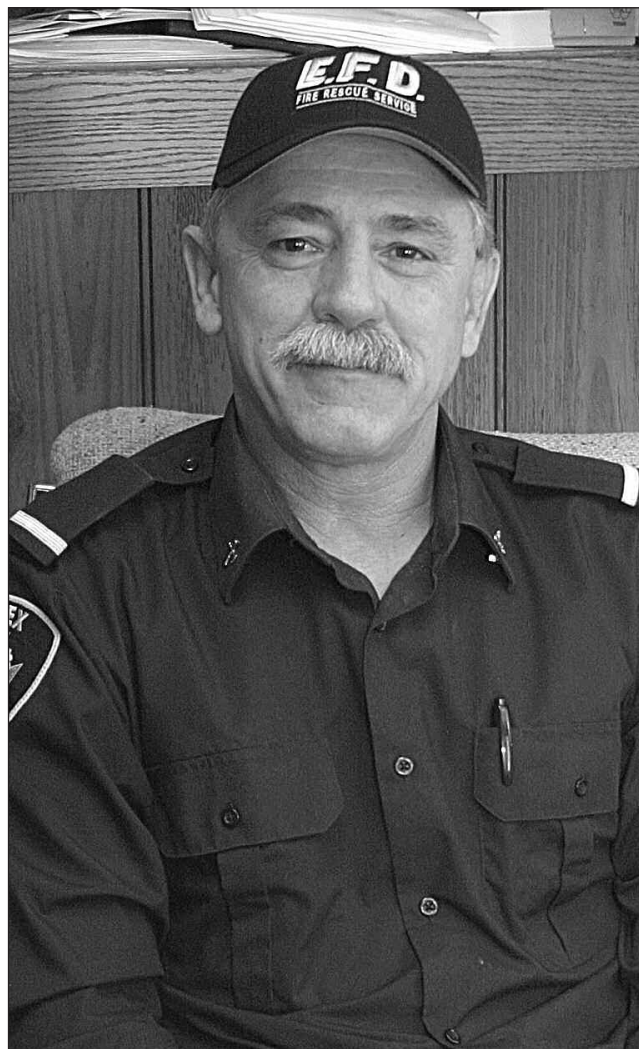
Reaume said the program shows children "what can happen to them" by playing with fire or setting fires, a message reinforced by a video featuring children speaking of their own experiences.

"TAPPC also teaches good behaviour when it comes to fire," said Reaume. "We tell the children that they could save the lives of their parents, brothers and sisters."

Children have been referred to the TAPPC program by parents, teachers, and police officers.

"Essex Police Services fully endorses the TAPPC program," said Essex Sgt. Gary Gamberta, who has witnessed the success of the program in the municipality.

Reaume said, statistically, boys are more commonly involved in fire play. In Essex, out of roughly



Helping kids - Essex firefighter Randy Reaume, above, is the coordinator for TAPPC, an arson prevention program for children who have been involved in fire play and fire setting.

20 children involved in the arson prevention program, only two have been girls, he said.

There are a number of telltale signs that may indicate your child is overly interested in fire and may be involved in fire play, including matches or lighters that go missing or are found in a child's belongings. Other indications are burn marks found on household items or your child's clothing or possessions.

Reaume said a number of things

can be done to protect your family from fire, including the supervision of young children at all times, locking away matches and lighters, and installing smoke detectors on every level of the home. Families are encouraged to test smoke detectors regularly and involve their children in developing a house fire escape plan.

Parents and caregivers should contact Essex Fire and Rescue Services if they believe a child is involved in fire play or fire setting.



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