

# An Explanation of the **SAFE Program** for Parents and Care Providers



## **What is SAFE?**

Student Awareness of Fire Education (SAFE) is a grant program to local fire departments that puts trained firefighter-educators in classrooms to conduct fire safety education in grades Pre-K through 12. The primary mission of SAFE is to teach children key behaviors so they can prevent fires, survive those that do occur, and respond correctly to emergencies. SAFE trains firefighters to deliver age-appropriate fire and life safety lessons in close coordination with classroom teachers and health educators.

## **How is SAFE Funded?**

SAFE began in FY '96. During the first seven years of the program, SAFE was funded by the tobacco tax (Health Protection Fund), because smoking is the leading cause of fire deaths. SAFE is currently funded by a state appropriation from general revenue funds distributed by the Executive Office of Public Safety. In FY '20, 248 fire departments shared \$1.2 million in funding.

## **Partnerships in the Classroom**

The SAFE program fosters a working partnership among firefighters, classroom teachers, and health educators. These professionals work together to introduce key fire safety behaviors such as *Stop, Drop, and Roll*; *Making and Practicing Home Escape Plans*; and *Reporting Fires and Emergencies* to children. Often, these fire safety behaviors are easily combined with math, science, language arts, health, or physical

education lessons to complement the classroom curriculum.

## **Key Fire Safety Behaviors**

The SAFE program identifies *23 Key Fire Safety Behaviors* that are taught in developmentally appropriate ways. The behaviors include:

- Smoke Alarm Maintenance
- Making and Practicing Home Escape Plans
- Crawl Low Under Smoke
- Stop, Drop and Roll
- Match and Lighter Safety
- Kitchen Fire and Burn Safety
- Reporting Fires and Emergencies

## **Department of Fire Services Training**

The credibility of SAFE rests on properly trained firefighters. High quality fire and life safety education specialists are the foundation of the program. The fire educator's enthusiasm and commitment to SAFE and to students is critical. The Massachusetts Firefighting Academy offers training programs for fire educators, including a 5-day *Public Fire and Life Safety Educator* class that is based on the National Fire Protection Association's Standard 1035, *Professional Qualifications for Public Fire and Life Safety Educator*. The Public Education Unit in the Office of the State Fire Marshal provides program support to local



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SAFE programs through in-service training, site visits and technical assistance.

## Benefits of SAFE

- Training children reduces anxiety so they are able to react to stressful situations; People fall back on what they have practiced.
- Fire, school, health and police departments work together to help children survive fires and other emergencies.
- Firefighters become role models for children.
- Objectives of the state's *Common Core of Learning* and *Health and Safety Learning* strands of the Department of Education's Health Curriculum Framework are met.
- Fires, burns and deaths are reduced.
- Medical and health care costs are reduced. It can cost more than \$160,000 to treat a burn survivor.

## Proven Success

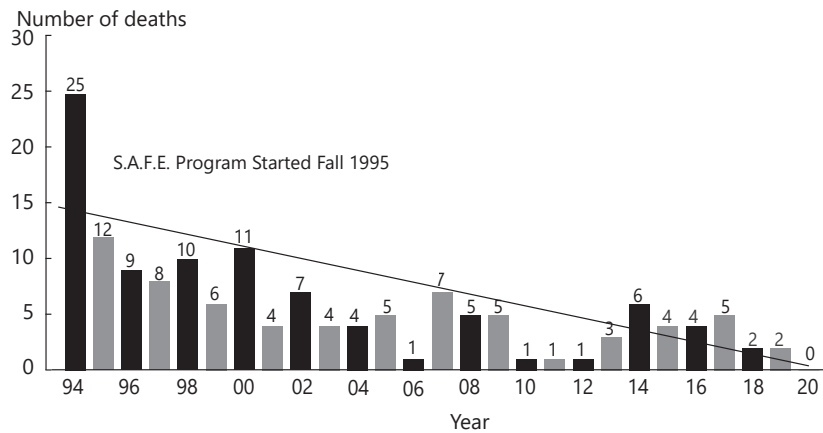
### *Child Fire Deaths Drop 78% Since SAFE Began*

The average annual number of fire deaths of children under age 18 has fallen by **78%** since SAFE began in the fall of 1995. Because fire death numbers fluctuate from year to year, it is helpful to look both at the trend line in the graph below, and at averages over several years.

During the 26 full years that SAFE has been in effect, from 1995 to 2020, the average number of child fire deaths per year is 4.9. In the 24 years prior to the SAFE program, 1969-1994, the average number of child fire deaths per year was 22.3.

Since SAFE began, there have been 383 documented *Young Heroes* - children who put into practice fire and life safety lessons they learned in the classroom during a real life emergency to save themselves or others.

## Child Fire Deaths 1994 - 2020



For a complete list of young heroes and their stories, go to: [www.mass.gov/dfs](http://www.mass.gov/dfs), search for *Young Hero Awards*, then scroll down to *success stories* and click on the young hero list for each year. Highlights from some *Young Hero* stories include:

- Arlington - In March of 2021, a 9-year-old boy saw a fire on the porch of his neighbor's house. He immediately told his parents and they called 9-1-1. The parents went to the neighbor's house, and they were instrumental in alerting the occupants, all of whom evacuated safely. Chief Kevin Kelly credits the boy for being observant and for quickly notifying his parents of the fire. His actions ultimately saved the lives of his neighbors and prevented a larger fire from occurring.
- Athol - In May of 2021, a 12-year-old boy saw a fire in his home. His mother was asleep. The boy immediately awakened his mother, they left the house and then called 9-1-1. Chief Joseph Guarnera credits the boy with saving his mother's life and protecting their house from extensive damage.

For more information about SAFE, please contact your local fire department's fire prevention office or the Public Education Unit in the Division of Fire Safety at 978-567-3381.