



Safe Kids USA

March 26, 2009

The Honorable Ron Wyden
U.S. Senate
223 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Wyden,

On behalf of Safe Kids USA, a member of Safe Kids Worldwide, I write to express our support for the *Protect Children from Dangerous Lighters Act of 2009*. This commonsense legislation would prohibit the manufacture, import, sale, or giving away of novelty lighters, cigarette lighters that look like toys. We thank you for your leadership on this issue.

The risks posed by children playing with matches and lighters are well-known and the consequences can be severe. Child-playing fires cause thousands of injuries and hundreds of deaths each year. The National Fire Protection Association estimated that in 2002 alone, almost 14,000 child-playing structure fires resulted in 210 deaths, 1,250 injuries, and \$339 million in direct damage. Most of these fires were started with matches or lighters.

Contributing to these troubling statistics are novelty lighters, fully-functioning cigarette lighters that look like children's toys and are readily available on store shelves throughout the nation. These lighters are shaped like toy animals, robots, cameras, cell phones, food and beverages, famous cartoon characters, and more. Some novelty lighters make sounds, for example, to mimic the ring of a cell phone, and feature flashing lights. Because of their appearance and features, novelty lighters are especially attractive to children. To make matters worse, novelty lighters are often sold next to items intended for children, such as candy, and are displayed within reach at a child's eye level. This counteracts long standing public health messaging to our children to stay away from matches and lighters.

We have already seen the ramifications of having novelty lighters fall into the hands of children. In 2007, a 2-year-old set his house in Arkansas on fire by playing with a lighter shaped like a motorcycle. He and his 15-month-old brother died in the blaze. In 2000, a 2-year-old in your home state of Oregon started a house fire by playing with a lighter resembling a toy dolphin. He was rescued by a firefighter, but suffered permanent brain damage, while his 6-year-old brother died. Other incidents involving children and novelty lighters have resulted in property damage and severe burns. Children have accidentally set their clothing on fire, burned themselves, and put others in their households at risk by lighting the bedding of sleeping family members.

Children are not the only ones fooled by the toy-like appearance of novelty lighters. Several reports have involved children bringing novelty lighters into schools, presumably unnoticed by teachers and principals because the lighters resemble ordinary toys.

Arkansas, Maine, Oregon, and Tennessee have already adopted statewide novelty lighter bans and Virginia's General Assembly passed a bill regulating the sale of novelty lighters in that state that currently awaits the Governor's signature. Many other states are considering bans this year. However, we cannot wait for individual states to act. As long as novelty lighters are available in the marketplace, our children will be at risk.

We strongly support passage of the *Protect Children from Dangerous Lighters Act of 2009* and we look forward to working with your office to move this legislation forward. If we can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 662-4463 or Stephanie A. Russell, Public Policy Associate, at (202) 662-0608.

Sincerely,



Alan Korn
Director of Public Policy & General Counsel