

Washington County Youth Fire Intervention Task Force

History of the Task Force

- Fayetteville Fire Marshal Dennis Ledbetter created and directed a Juvenile Fire Setter Program in Washington County starting in 1988.
- In 1999, the standards he developed were adopted and expanded for a statewide intervention, referral, and education program sponsored by the Arkansas Children's Hospital. This program was led by Jimmy Parks, Head Registered Nurse of the Arkansas Burn Center.
- In August of 2000, Cheri Carden, Community Liaison for Ozark Guidance Center and Allan Skogen, Asst. Fire Marshal for Springdale Fire Department, met at the second annual conference on Juvenile Fire Setting hosted by Arkansas Children's Hospital.
- It was at this time that Cheri and Allan decided to form a Washington County Juvenile Fire Setters Intervention Task Force. This was the first task force of this kind formed in the state.
- The purpose of the task force was to identify, track, and assess juvenile fire setters and develop intervention, referral, and education programs. The goal of the task force was to reduce the number of reoccurring fires set by juveniles.
- The task force was organized with the intent to have members that would include but not be limited to representatives from:
 - Washington County Fire Marshal's Office
 - Law Enforcement agencies in the county and cities
 - Fire Departments in the county and cities
 - Washington County Juvenile Court
 - Washington County Department of Emergency Management
 - Ozark Guidance Center
 - Arkansas Department of Human Services
 - Public School Representatives
 - School Resource Officers
 - Hospital Staff
 - Forestry Service
- The first meeting of the task force was in September, 2000.
- Founding Member for the program was Fayetteville Fire Marshal, Dennis Ledbetter in 1988. The founding members taking the program and making it a task force were: Cherie Carden of Ozark Guidance Center, Allan Skogen of Springdale Fire Department, Lisa Hawthorn of Arkansas Department of Children and Family Services, Danny Farrar of Fayetteville Fire Department, Officer Prince of the Arkansas Forestry Service, and two school resource officers (names unknown).
- Allan was elected chairperson and Cheri was elected Secretary/Treasurer
- In 2001, Allan went to work for the Rogers Fire Department and Cheri became Chairperson

- In February 2002, Washington County Judge Jerry Hunton issued an Executive Order to make the Juvenile Fire Setters Intervention Task Force official and to place it under the auspices of the Department of Emergency Management. Judge Hunton stated, "This task force is by far the most active Juvenile Fire Setter Program in the state."
- Later in 2002 By-laws were written and created the Co-Chairperson position with the director of the County Department of Emergency management being a perpetual Co-Chairperson with the other Co-Chairperson being elected by the other members. The Secretary/Treasurer was also elected by the other members.
- In January 2007, Cheri Carden stepped down after six years of faithful service and James Hales from Springdale Fire Department was elected the new Co-Chairperson.
- In April 2007, the program was formally placed under the Washington County Fire Marshal's Office and the name was formally changed from "Juvenile Fire Setters Task Force" to "Youth Fire Intervention Task Force".
- In April 2008, James Hales was promoted within his department and was no longer able to participate in the task force. Sue Butler of the Fayetteville Fire Department was elected as the new Co-Chairperson.
- In 2011 Casey Atwood, Program Director of the Children's Safety Center, was made Secretary
- In 2012 Tyler McCartney, Asst. Fire Marshal of Washington County, was made the Treasurer