

Queensland Family and Child Commission

Submission

To: Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Date: 17/11/2016

Topic: Review of the mandatory safety standards for disposable cigarette lighters

Queensland Family and Child Commission

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Submission summary:

This submission provides pertinent facts and advice in relation to the deaths of 35 children in 23 house fires in Queensland in the last 12 years, in order to support the ACCC's review of the mandatory safety standard for disposable cigarette lighters.

Coronial findings indicate that one third (8 out of 23) of the house fires with child fatalities were caused by children playing with lighters. The QFCC emphasises the importance of a child resistant design, as most of the children playing with lighters were aged under 5 years.

The QFCC supports option 3 in the consultation paper, which is to accept the voluntary Australian standard or multiple trusted international standards around the general safety requirements for disposable cigarette lighters. This option would:

- Clearly outline the test procedures to be applied to cigarette lighters.
- Specify the size, legibility, permanence and prominence of warning labels.
- Ensure that the products comply with the general safety and child resistance requirements.

Data for prevention activities

QFCC collects, analyses and publishes information about child deaths to help prevent future deaths and serious injuries. We work with researchers and other agencies to raise community awareness and develop prevention programs and policies, by identifying risk factors, trends and emerging safety hazards. QFCC can provide detailed child death data to researchers and organisations, at no cost – please email child_death_prevention@qfcc.qld.gov.au

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is pleased to provide a submission to the ACCC in relation to the review of the mandatory safety standard for disposable cigarette lighters.

The QFCC is responsible for maintaining a register of all child deaths in Queensland and providing the [Annual Report: Deaths of children and young people, Queensland](#) each year. This role allows the QFCC to review the circumstances and causes of child deaths and identify risk factors, patterns and trends.

This information can be used to inform and improve child death and injury prevention efforts. The QFCC's Queensland Child Death Register contains detailed data in relation to natural and non-natural deaths of children and young people registered in Queensland since 1 January 2004.

Deaths of children in house fires from January 2004 to September 2016

The Queensland Child Death Register information on child deaths in house or dwelling fires in the years from 2004 to 2016 indicates that:

- 35 children died in 23 house or dwelling fires in Queensland over the 12 year period.
- The single worst incident was in 2011 when 8 children and 3 adults died in a house fire.
- Young children are at particular risk in house fires:
 - 18 children were aged 1–4 years
 - 7 children were aged 5–9 years
 - 6 children were aged 10–14 years
 - 4 children were aged 15–17 years
 - No deaths occurred of infants under one year.
- Out of the 23 house or dwelling fires, 14 were caused by non-intentional ignitions. Eight of these were caused by children playing with lighters and accidentally starting a fire, which resulted in 10 individual deaths. Evidence indicated that a cigarette lighter was used in seven cases and a BBQ lighter was used in one case.

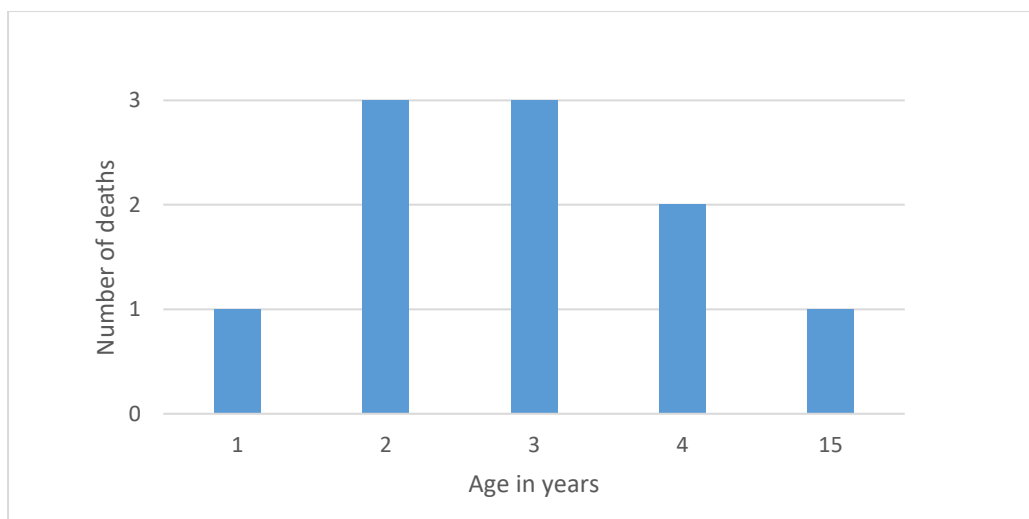
Circumstances of house fires caused by lighters

While coronial information could not determine the cause of the fire in all of the circumstances, the cause of 8 out of the 23 house or dwelling fires was attributed to children playing with cigarette lighters or multi-purpose lighters. The circumstances of each of these cases tended to involve children finding or gaining access to lighters. Given the ages of the children involved, each case was found to be accidental.

The children who were playing with the lighters were also the most likely to become deceased in the house fire. This was because they were in close proximity to the fire, which made it difficult for them to safely evacuate. This issue was compounded by the fact that in some cases the children did not immediately alert a supervising adult to the fact that there was a fire, which meant that they could not be safely evacuated.

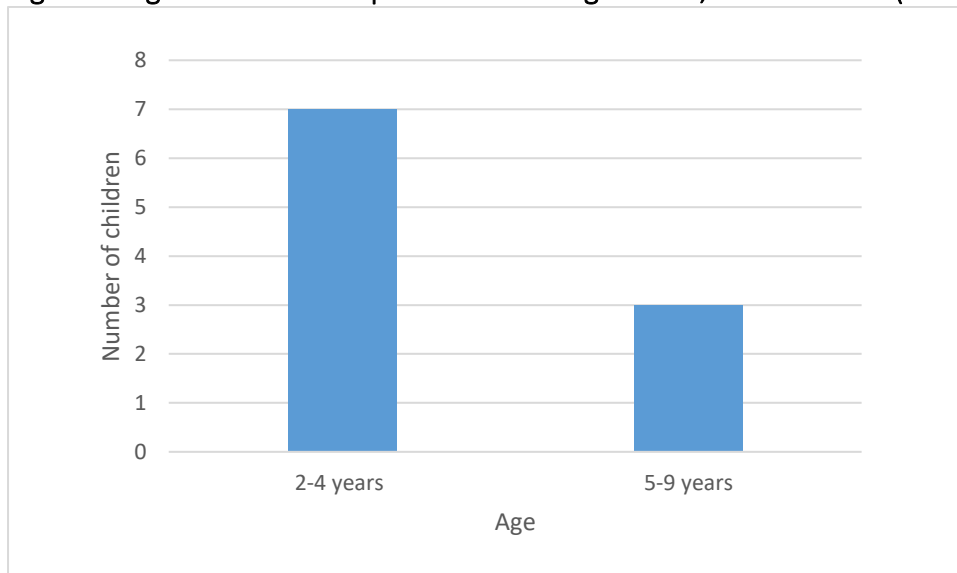
Figures 1 and 2 illustrate that children under the age of 5 were the most likely to either start a fire using a lighter, or become deceased in a fire that was started from a lighter. Out of the 10 children who died, 5 were also the children who started the fires, and all of these children were under 5 years of age.

Figure 1: Child deaths in lighter-related house fires by age, 2004-2016 ($n = 10$)



Note: The eight lighter-related house fires resulted in 10 child deaths.

Figure 2: Age of children suspected of starting the fire, 2004 to 2016 ($n = 10$)



Note: The cause of two of the eight house fires was attributed to the actions of two children.

Response to consultation questions

Question 4

Which policy do you support and why?

The QFCC supports option 3, to accept the voluntary Australian standard or multiple international standards. There are a number of reasons that the QFCC supports this approach. First, this option clearly outlines safety test methods that must be followed when testing disposable cigarette lighters, and includes specifications regarding the text size, legibility, permanence and prominence of the safety warnings that must be affixed to the lighters – particularly the warning to keep the lighters out of reach of children. This option also ensures that disposable cigarette lighters comply with general safety and child resistance requirements.

The QFCC particularly supports the child resistance requirements that are contained in the US CPSC standard, which make lighters resistant to successful operation by children under 5 years of age. As illustrated by the above data, children under the age of 5 were the largest group to unintentionally start a fatal house fire using a lighter, as well as become deceased in house or dwelling fires where the cause could be attributed to a lighter.

Ensuring that cigarette lighters could not be successfully operated by children under the age of five could significantly reduce the number of non-intentional house fires, and associated deaths and injuries, caused by disposable lighters.

Questions 9 and 10

Do you think multi-purpose lighters should be considered for future regulatory proposal? Do you have any other comments in relation to multi-purpose lighters?

The QFCC submits that multi-purpose lighters should be considered for future regulatory proposal. Evidence indicates that one child death in Queensland in the last 12 years can be attributed to a house fire that was non-intentionally started with a BBQ lighter. The deceased child was under 4 and was the person who lit the fire.

There were a further seven cases where the cause of the fire could not be determined. In two of these cases, the deceased children were found in the same room that the fire started, which may indicate the fires were unintentionally lit.

The QFCC would strongly support using the US CPSC or European safety standards, specifically in relation to making these products resistant to successful operation by children under the age of 5, as in line with the data outlined above, children in this age group are the most likely to both non-intentionally start and become deceased in fires caused by multi-purpose lighters.