



New Jersey Division of Fire Safety

# FIRE FOCUS



Excellence in Public Safety

## International Association of Arson Investigators Honors Stephen Letts as Investigator of the Year



**Stephen Letts proudly accepts the “Investigator of the Year” Award accompanied by his family, friends, and colleagues.**

New Jersey Division of Fire Safety (NJDFS) Fire Investigator and K9 Handler Stephen Letts received the Investigator of the Year award from the New Jersey Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI) during their annual general meeting, held in Atlantic City as part of April’s IAAI International Training Conference. Letts was nominated by an outside investigative agency in recognition of his years of assistance and expertise in fire and arson cases—often working alongside his K9 partners.

In 2003, Letts became one of the original members of the NJDFS Fire Investigation Unit, after performing inspections and investigations as a county fire marshal for many years. With the addition of his expertise, the Fire Investigation Unit added K9 capabilities becoming the only state-level agency to provide Ignitable Liquid Detection K9 services. Additionally, Letts provides K9 training and practical exam assistance for the Basic Fire Investigator courses offered by both the NJIAAI and the NJ DCJ Academy.

In addition to this award, Letts and NJDFS Fire Investigator / K9 Handler Rod Meyer were recognized and received NJIAAI “Life Membership” Awards at this event, for their years of dedicated and specialized service to the chapter. Some of Letts’ family members and coworkers attended the event, along with a ballroom filled with industry peers, who celebrated his well-deserved recognition.



## Excellence in Public Safety

# Bayonne's Washington Community School Captures 2025 NJ FIRE Bowl Title

On May 21, 2025, the 18th Annual New Jersey FIRE Bowl program culminated at Kean University's STEM Building with the top two teams answering questions on stage for the state championship. In a close-fought three-round competition, the team from Bayonne's Washington Community School edged out Dwight D. Eisenhower School of Freehold in the final round.

The 2025 edition of the FIRE Bowl proved to be the most competitive ever, with 32 teams of 7th- and 8th-graders battling throughout the spring to see which school knows the most about all things fire-related.



New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Chief of Staff Kia King joins State Fire Marshal Richard Mikutsky and Deputy Director Louis Kilmer in congratulating the 2025 New Jersey State Champions from Bayonne's Washington Community School.

The program, which began as a partnership between the NJ Division of Fire Safety and Dr. Frank Field to promote the "Fire Is" educational videos, continues to grow each year. The goal is to instill life-long fire safety practices through spirited competition. In addition to studying fire prevention, students study fire science, firefighting operations, the history of fire/firefighting, as well as fire in current events.

Since 2006, over 2,200 middle school students have participated in the New Jersey FIRE Bowl, several of whom have gone on to pursue careers in the fire service.



## Excellence in Public Safety

# STATE FIRE MARSHAL MESSAGE

Happy Summer!

While summer is synonymous with barbecues, parades, and fireworks, the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety advises everyone to enjoy fireworks at public displays conducted by professionals. Whenever possible, consider using safer alternatives such as glow sticks, confetti poppers, or colored streamers.



Fireworks are often a highlight of many celebrations, from Independence Day to New Year's Eve. While they bring excitement and spectacle, fireworks also pose significant risks, including burns, eye injuries, hearing loss, fires, and even fatalities. Each year, thousands of people—many of them children—are treated in emergency rooms for fireworks-related injuries. While many of these incidents are due to amateurs attempting to use professional-grade, homemade, or other illegal fireworks or explosives, less powerful devices like small firecrackers and sparklers can also cause significant burns.

Sparklers burn at about 2,000 degrees – hot enough to melt some metals. Sparklers can quickly ignite clothing, and children have received severe burns from dropping sparklers on their feet. According to the National Fire Protection Association, sparklers alone account for more than 25% of emergency room visits for fireworks injuries. For children under five years of age, sparklers accounted for nearly half of the total estimated injuries.

Fireworks are best enjoyed when safety is the top priority. The safest option is to leave fireworks to the professionals, but if you choose to use legal fireworks at home, follow all safety guidelines, supervise children closely, and be mindful of your community and environment. A few simple precautions can prevent injuries, fires, and tragedies—ensuring your celebrations are memorable for all the right reasons.

Wishing you a safe summer,  
Rich Mikutsky  
New Jersey State Fire Marshal





## Excellence in Public Safety

# **NJ Division of Fire Safety Trains and Prepares for Potential Violent Events Statewide**

In order to be prepared to respond to active violent events, the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety is part of a working group called “SAVER” (Standardized Active Violent Event Response). The coalition consists of numerous New Jersey state agencies that includes the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, State Police, Department of Corrections, and Department of Health.

To promote this invaluable initiative, the Department of Community Affairs and Division of Fire Safety purchased 25 Counterstrike boards. They are used to coordinate response should an active violent event take place. The boards will be distributed statewide to all fire academies so they will be available and accessible in every county.

The ASIM (Active Shooter Incident Management)-Basic is an awareness level course designed to improve incident management and the integration of first responders and public safety personnel to active shooter events. The course provides a model framework to be used by law enforcement, fire, and EMS to manage active shooter event responses to improve time to threat neutralization, medical intervention, and survivability of victims. The Counterstrike boards are used to accomplish the exercise scenarios.



Bureau of Fire Department Services Chief Bruce Tynan and Program Specialist Scott Royle demonstrate the use of the Counterstrike boards to Deputy Director Louis Kilmer, State Fire Marshal Rich Mikutsky, DCA Commissioner Jacquelyn A. Suárez, and Office of Homeland Security & Preparedness Director Laurie R. Doran.



## Excellence in Public Safety

# NJDFS Partners with Kidde To Provide Local Departments with Smoke/CO Alarms

In the wake of massive wildfires that took place in New Jersey this spring, representatives from Kidde reached out to the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety to see how they can help. The result was a shipment of combination smoke/carbon monoxide alarms that are now being distributed to departments throughout the state.



State Fire Marshal Rich Mikutsky delivers smoke and CO alarms to South Essex Fire Department Chief Joe Alvarez and his staff.

“It’s Kidde’s mission to help make every home a safer home, and that is why we have our Cause For Alarm campaign, which is focused on supporting at-risk communities through smoke and carbon monoxide alarm donations as well as free educational resources including a safety toolkit, children’s book, sing-along-song, special partnerships and more! We’re honored to be able to support New Jersey communities to help save more lives.”

– Stephanie Berzinski, Senior Manager, Communications, Kidde.



The New Jersey Division of Fire Safety’s Charles Lavin drops off smoke alarms to Rich Maher of Neptune City Fire Department.





## Excellence in Public Safety

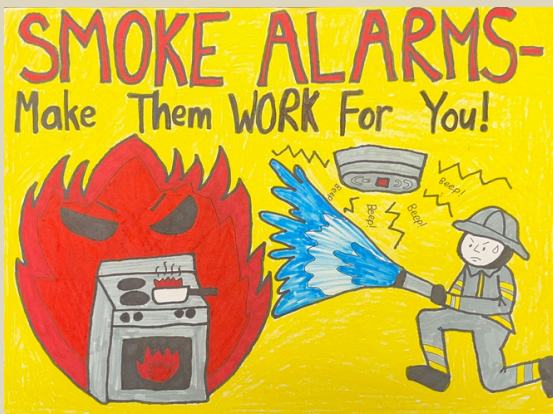


# NJDFS Selects State Winners of 2024-2025 Fire Safety Poster Contest

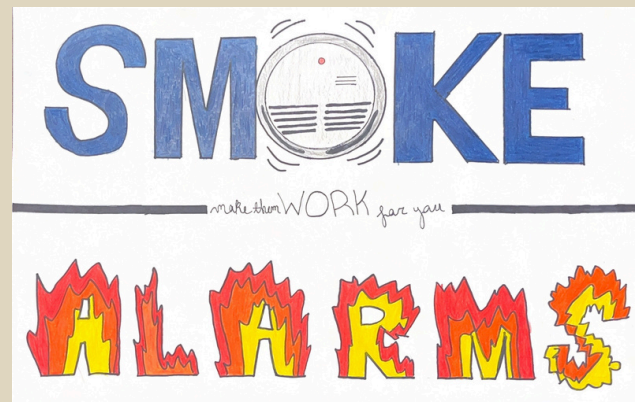


Throughout the 2024-2025 school year, artistic students from around New Jersey created original artwork to promote fire safety messages in their schools. Using the past year's Fire Prevention Week theme - "Smoke Alarms - Make Them Work For You" - young artists from kindergarten to 12th grade submitted thousands of entries into the New Jersey Fire Safety Poster Contest.

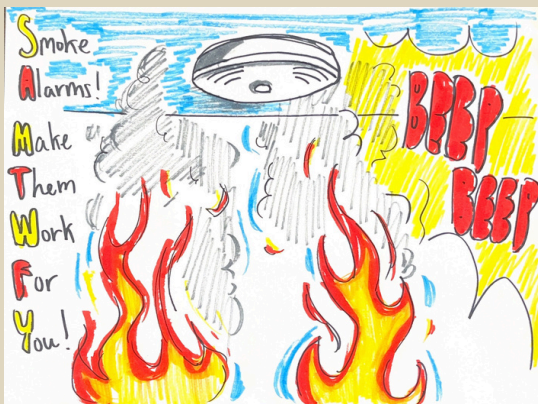
The contest is a collaborative effort between the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety and the New Jersey Fire Prevention & Protection Association. The winners shown below will be featured in the 2026 New Jersey Fire Safety Calendar:



Ariel Im  
Millington School  
Millington, NJ



Claire Oswald  
Brick Township High School  
Brick, NJ



Angela Yang  
Central Middle School  
Stirling, NJ

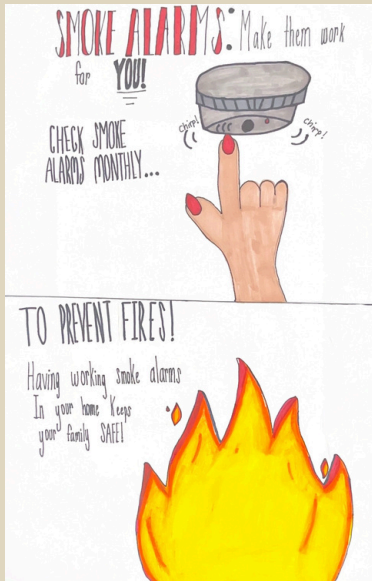


Ruhaani Singla  
Brookside Elementary School  
Monroe Twp., NJ



Excellence in Public Safety

# 2024-2025 Fire Safety Poster Contest Winners (cont.)



Anika Manubarthi  
Woodland Elementary School  
Warren, NJ



Devyi Holguia Montecede  
Kearny High School  
Kearny, NJ



Sebastian Torres-Abreu  
South Main St. School  
Pleasantville, NJ



Annalena Hampois  
Central Regional Middle School  
Bayville, NJ





## Excellence in Public Safety

# 2024-2025 Fire Safety Poster Contest Winners (cont.)



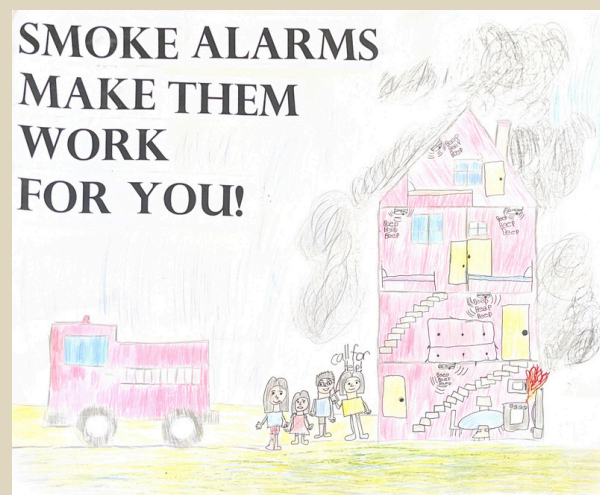
Alicia Li  
Clarendon Elementary School  
Secaucus, NJ



Jacob Cardadeiro  
Bayberry Elementary School  
Watchung, NJ



Renny Gonzalez  
Pleasantville High School  
Pleasantville, NJ



Juliette Cherian  
Bayberry Elementary School  
Watchung, NJ





## Excellence in Public Safety

# SUMMER FIRE SAFETY

As the seasons change here in New Jersey, so do the hazards that could potentially cause fires. Here are some tips that your fire department, or fire prevention bureau, can promote in your towns this summer season:

### Fireworks

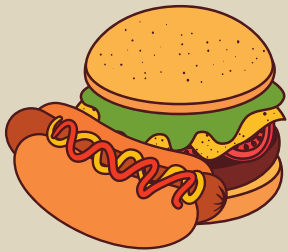
**\*To enjoy fireworks this summer, the best way is to see a public show put on by professionals.**

**\*Be aware of how dangerous even simple fireworks are at home. Sparklers can reach 2,000 degrees F and cause 3rd degree burns.**

**\*NEVER allow young children to handle fireworks.**



### Grilling



**\*Before you barbecue, make sure all elements of your gas grill are working properly and not leaking gas.**

**\*Keep your grill well away (at least 10 feet) from your home or anything that can burn.**

**\*NEVER leave the grill unattended. Closely monitor what's cooking.**

### Campfires / Fire Pits

**\*Build campfires at least 25 feet away from tents, shrubs, and anything that can burn.**

**\*Use fire pits OUTDOORS ONLY. Put them on a flat, level surface.**

**\*Fires for recreation should never be lit on balconies, underneath eaves or overhangs, and away from railings or siding.**



As with all seasons, focus on having and practicing fire escape plans and stress the importance of having working smoke alarms in the home.

If we're all fire smart, Jersey is *shore* to have an amazing summer!



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TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION UNIT:  
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