



Jessica Boisclair • Daily Times

Department of Environmental Management Forest Ranger Dave Palumbo and Smokey Bear were special guests of Coventry's Tiogue Elementary last Friday. They shared fire safety tips with a pair of kindergarten classes at the school.

Kindergarteners get celebrity surprise

Smokey Bear, with an assist from a local ranger, gives Tiogue Elementary students some pointers on fire safety

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COVENTRY — Kindergarteners at Tiogue Elementary School got to interact with Smokey Bear Friday morning while they were educated by their special guest and others about ways to prevent forest fires.

Rhode Island Forest Ranger David Palumbo and Smokey Bear joined Greg Tripp and Kristen Abood's classes

to teach the children what not to do while interacting with fire.

Before Smokey joined the presentation, Palumbo told the students not to be scared and gave them some information on black bears.

He told them if they ever go camping with their parents and encounter a bear to wave their hands in the air.

"If you do this, 90 percent of the time the bear runs away," he said. "Usually the bears are more afraid of you than

you are of them. The last sighting we saw was in South Kingstown; they are just like any other wild animal."

Palumbo, who's been a ranger for 29 years, said this will be his last year traveling to schools to educate children.

"If you saw these in the road and you happen to walk by, tell me what you would do," he asked the students while showing them matches and a lighter.

Many of the students yelled out that

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they would take the items and "throw them away" or "give them to an adult."

He explained that educating the students about wildfires is important, especially in Rhode Island.

"Fires that begin in Rhode Island do not start like they do out west when lightning hits something," he said. "Most of the time fires here are started by people."

Once the kindergarteners memorized the motto "only you can prevent wild fires," they were given badges proclaiming them

Junior Forest Rangers.

Through a short video presentation, the children were able to learn the five rules to fire safety: only you can prevent wildfires, always be careful with fire, never play with matches or lighters, always watch your campfire and make sure your campfire is completely out before you leave.

Palumbo explained that his supervisor went to New Mexico to visit Mount Capitan, where the legacy of Smokey began.

In 1950 the forest on Mount Capitan caught fire, trapping a bear cub up in a tree. The cub was rescued and taken to

Santa Fe, New Mexico's capital, where he was treated for burns.

According to the Smokey Bear website, a letter was written asking to dedicate the bear to a publicity program of fire prevention and conservation.

"They still have a part of the tree on that mountain," he said. "The forest all grew back but there was a lot of devastation; 17,000 acres was burnt that day."

After the presentation, each student was able to take a picture with Smokey, high-fiving and hugging him with smiles on their faces.