

# **FIREFIGHTER ATTITUDES TOWARD PREVENTION AND HOME SAFETY VISITS**

Summary of Presentation for Smoke Alarm Summit, March 31, 2015

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**Basis:** A national survey of firefighters' attitudes toward prevention was conducted via a short, on-line questionnaire. The link to the survey was widely distributed by Vision 20/20, IFE, WSAFM, and several other fire organizations. The survey was targeted to line firefighters assigned to operations. It was non-random but the respondents were well spread across communities of various population sizes, career/combination/volunteer departments, and geographic areas. New York, Pennsylvania, and New England were underrepresented..

**Respondents:** Most questions were answered by 600 firefighters from 173 fire departments in 42 states. Some self-selected upon seeing information about the survey, and some were asked to respond by their chief. 87% of respondents said they were assigned to operations, as was desired. 82% were below the rank of battalion chief. 75% had ten years or more service.

## **KEY RESULTS: STARTLING!**

**Inspections:** 88% of the firefighters said they had participated in fire safety inspections. Of these, 80% did businesses or institutions, 64% schools, and 75% said they had done inspections in single family residences!!! From a parallel survey of heads of public fire education, most home inspection visits probably were done in response to requests, but still, the ice has been broken on doing home visits for many firefighters. The question now is scale of doing them.

**Fire Safety Education:** 97% said they had participated in public education; of these, 94% were in schools, 85% during station visits, and 29% in single family homes!

**Importance of Prevention:** 98% said that prevention was important for their departments to do. 58% said their departments should do much more or somewhat more prevention. 39% said it was at about the right level now. Only 2% said do less.

**Home Safety Visits:** 63% thought their departments should do home safety visits, like checking and installing smoke alarms, 22% said no, and 16% were not sure. 77% of the firefighters said they personally would be willing to do home safety visits. The main reasons given for doing them were good public relations (95%); increase value of firefighter to the public (85%); and, in third place (80%,) to reduce casualties. The fourth place reason was to reduce injuries to firefighters. For those who said they would not do home safety visits (12%) or not sure (11%), the main reasons they gave were too much to do already (61%- especially volunteers), fear of liability (43%), not trained to do them (18%) and concerned about personal safety visiting homes (11%). Quite a few wrote in that they thought people's privacy should be respected, and that it was a step too far for government to intrude unless requested. [Note: virtually all home visits are made with voluntary acceptance by the household.]

**Data Needed and Its Use:** A larger, more random sample is needed to see if these truly are national firefighter perceptions, and how the perceptions vary by area and type of department. If the existing data are valid, we need to address those reluctant to do home visits by showing that liability risk is low and that most of the community would welcome them. . We need to train them. And we need to get fire departments to think strategically about goals, and possibly re-prioritize activities to be able to do more prevention.