Vision 20/20

National Strategies for Fire Loss Prevention

Community Risk Reduction

Community Risk Reduction (CRR) is the identification and prioritization of risks followed by the coordinated application of resources to minimize the probability or occurrence and/or the impact of unfortunate events.

Solutions to the fire problems our communities face demand an integrated approach that balances emergency response capabilities with proactive measures that work together to reduce risks. Within the fire service context, this means that fire departments not only respond to emergencies after the fact, but work to prevent or reduce the effects of their occurrence in the first place. It assumes that the fire service will act proactively as a risk management entity for their community. It also assumes they will partner with other community organizations as needed to accomplish their risk management objectives. Applying CRR does not mean that fires will not occur. It does not mean that all risks may be mitigated by one mechanism or another. It does not diminish the need for emergency response capabilities.

Applying CRR affords U.S. fire service agencies the opportunity, through a systematic approach, to proactively manage the risks within their communities.

CRR is not a new concept for the fire service. For years fire departments have been involved in some form of community risk reduction through building inspections and public education since they were first organized in the U.S. But this concept needs to be applied in a focused manner, and truly integrated into the mission of the fire department. The process of CRR often unfolds in a predictable sequence of: (1) identifying fire risks at the operational level (preferably by fire station response area); (2) prioritizing the risks to be addressed, and (3) coordinating elements of emergency response with preventive tactics that mitigate risks.

CRR for the fire service has received international attention through efforts in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. Data from these jurisdictions are indicating a significant reduction in fire deaths and fire incidents.

Vision 20/20 promotes CRR concepts in the U.S. - and a specific strategy embedded within them that emphasizes home safety visits

For example, Merseyside, UK reports reductions of fire incident rates of more than 30% and reduced fire death rates by nearly 60% in the twelve years they have been actively utilizing a specific component of CRR: home safety visits.

As a discernable portion of CRR strategies – home safety visits have been singled out as one of the more effective measures that the fire service can take to improve public safety. International experiences have driven the level of attention these programs are receiving in the U.S. But the concept of home safety visits has been in existence in the U.S. for many years, and documented as early as 1914 in Portland, Oregon. Home safety visits in Edmonds, Washington[1] were conducted in the early 1980's, contributing to a 62% drop in fire incident rates for the entire City. When the program was eliminated two years later, the fire incident rates resumed at their previous rate, providing evidence that the program was producing amazing results.

Similar to Community Policing, CRR programs including home safety visits are necessary to control rising emergency incident rates even while resources for fire departments are receiving cuts.

Vision 20/20 and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation are actively promoting CRR concepts, and home safety visits as part of a strategy driven by fire station leadership. And because the risks of one neighborhood are often different from another, properly designed CRR programs (including home safety visits) take into account those differences and vary from station to station. What they all have in common may be home safety visits, but the safety points emphasized may be very different for each station service area.

Funding from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Assistance to Fire Fighters, Fire Prevention and Safety Grant program to the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE), US Branch enables activities directed toward reducing fire losses in the United States. Vision 20/20 is advised by a Steering Committee comprised of noted fire service and related agency leaders. They guide a national strategic planning process for fire loss prevention that targets and coordinates fire prevention efforts.

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[1] Information provided by Tri-Data www.sysplan.com/tridata