



Presentation Title:

Working Smoke Alarms

Presented by:

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I. Program/Project Overview:

In 2007, the City recorded five fire fatalities, with the last one occurring on December 30 of that year. The one everyone remembers, and for whom the City's smoke alarm ordinance is named, is 23-year-old Peter Talen, who died at 123 N. Bedford St. in the early morning hours of Sunday, November 18, 2007. All 6 of the house's smoke alarms were in good working order when students moved in during August. On the night Peter died, only one alarm in the basement was operable.

In March 2009, the City Council passed a new smoke alarm ordinance requiring smoke alarms:

- In each bedroom
- In each sleeping area
- Within six feet of each door leading to a bedroom or sleeping area of each unit
- On each floor of the building

The smoke alarm ordinance also requires:

- Hardwired smoke alarms w/battery backup **OR**
- Smoke alarms powered by a 10-year lithium battery in a tamper-resistant compartment.
- Unless otherwise specified by the manufacturer, **no smoke alarm shall remain in service longer than ten years.**

II. Formative Evaluation - Planning

- Homes without operating smoke alarms place residents at a higher risk of fire death.
- The Public/Private Fire Safety Council reports that during the period of 1999-2001, 70% of fire deaths occurred in homes without working smoke alarms.
- Madison, WI is the state capitol and home to UW-Madison.
- The City has a population of 233,209, with a student population of 42,000+.
- The level of renter-occupied housing (52%) exceeds the national average (34%).

III. Process Evaluation - Implementation

- Passage of the ordinance was the springboard for heavy media activity.
- The Community Education Unit developed new materials for distribution and on the MFD website.
- Presentations outlining the ordinances were prepared and delivered to retailers and property owners.
- Additional educational materials included:

- Signage on Department vehicles.
- T-shirts specific to the cause!
- Media activity created widespread awareness of the ordinance.
- Comm Ed also concentrated efforts on reaching out to high-risk populations (e.g. older adults, families with young children, and people with disabilities) through a series of presentations and attendance at health & safety events.
- The MFD fielded hundreds of calls regarding the new ordinance,.
- Community education spent weeks and months on planning and coordination:
 - Contacting partner agencies to get referrals for installations.
 - Contacting and scheduling recipients
 - Negotiating with Fire Fighters Local 311 to allow for on-duty installation.
 - Preparing training and evaluation for installations.
- Installations were performed over a 3-year period.

IV. Impact Evaluation – Short Term Results

- Significantly greater awareness of the need to replace smoke alarms after 10 years.

V. Outcome Evaluation – Long Term Results

- Since the passage of the smoke alarm ordinance and the ensuing installation program, Madison has recorded a single fire fatality.

Recommendations for others:

- Get Buy-in from potential opponents.
- Talk to the experts.
- Messaging – repeat, repeat, repeat, and never deviate.
- Prepare – With ordinance passage uncertain, we delayed preparing educational materials when the effort may have been unnecessary. Any pre-approval work would have been well worth the effort. Information for the community and property owners must be available immediately after the ordinance adoption.
- Partner with everyone you can to build consensus and buy-in. BUT
- Nothing is more valuable than support from someone who has lived through the consequences of a bad choice.

Conclusions:

- Stay focused on your message and your mission.
- New language can change the community conversation and with it, the culture and behavior that makes a difference.