



**Presentation Title: The Art and Science of  
Developing a Prevention Culture in both the  
Political Environment and Fire Department**

**Presented by: Fire Chief Nyle Zikmund**

**I. Program/Project Overview:**

The Spring Lake Park – Blaine – Mounds View Fire Department is a non-profit combination department that protects an urban/suburban population of 79,000 citizens with 10 full-time, 49 volunteer and 21 Fire Corps firefighters. The annual operating budget is \$1.9 million.

Prior to Chief Zikmund's administration, less than ½ of 1% of the budget was allocated to prevention. The department culture was entrenched in response; stations, staffing, apparatus, etc. as evidenced by our 93 volunteers, two ladders trucks including a tiller, and number of stations.

Changing this culture and environment both within the department and amongst the three city councils that govern the municipalities we protect was formidable to say the least.

**II. Formative Evaluation - Planning**

A combination of risk assessment and research was conducted from 1995 to 2001. Research was focused on alarms, sprinklers, response, injuries and budget allocations. A risk analysis assessment was conducted with a focus on developing a comprehensive plan that included a substantive staffing plan. Presentation was developed and delivered to three city councils and fire board.

Program goals and objectives included:

1. Determination of actual risk.
2. Reprioritize budget allocations to achieve appropriate balance.
3. Expand prevention activities.
4. Evaluate everything.
5. Institutionalize prevention.

**III. Process Evaluation - Implementation**

Upon completion of the research sufficient data was collected to begin implementation of the plan. The Strategic Plan research outcomes supported a strong migration to prevention coupled with a risk-assessment approach towards emergency response. Whenever possible –focus was on creating environmental change; those things that are visible on a daily basis.

Specific changes included the following:

1. Alarm call response changed from "fleet" response to duty chief.
2. Single Station calls whenever possible (as opposed to fleet response).
3. Creation of a prevention division, recruiting of volunteer prevention firefighter, inclusion of them into pension program.
4. Significant reduction in suppression volunteer staffing with goal of 30 day and 30 night available.

5. Increase inspection division. (rotation of inspections based on occupancy)
6. Sprinkler everything.
7. Support/increase fire investigation division.

The changes on the emergency response were supported by the research and have and continue to provide the funding for the prevention activities. Substantial savings were realized in fuel and maintenance costs related to the apparatus operation. Even greater savings occurred in the personnel side with payroll savings, gear, medical, training, uniform and hiring costs providing more than \$100,000 in savings over a five year period.

#### **IV. Impact Evaluation – Short Term Results**

1. Immediate savings sufficient to fund prevention division and purchase chiefs vehicles for all four of our duty chiefs. Duty chief to go to alarm calls.
2. Dramatic reduction in suppression firefighter injuries.
3. Call volume decrease.
4. Retrofitting of high risk occupancies with sprinklers.
5. Reduction in volunteer suppression staff.
6. Substantial support from councils, residents.
7. Ability to analyze and focus on prevention issues; school programs, juvenile fire setting, home safety survey.

#### **V. Outcome Evaluation – Long Term Results**

1. Increase in fire code prevention staff from 2 to 5.
2. Employment of Full Time Prevention Chief.
3. Increase in full time staff from 3 to 10.
4. Lowest injury rate for any similar size fire department in the State of Minnesota; reduction in insurance premium resulting in savings of over \$10,000 per year.
5. Call volume decreased 28% when adjusted for population, 39.5% when adjusted for market value.
6. Strong council support and investment into Fire Department.
7. Retrofitting of all schools (18) with sprinklers.
8. Retrofitting of all hazards and senior buildings with sprinklers.
9. Installation of sprinklers in all townhomes.
10. Implementation of Zero Interest Sprinkler Loan Program.
11. Documented saves from home survey program.
12. Decrease in juvenile fire setter incidents.
13. Number of certified investigators increased from 0 to 4.

#### **Recommendations for others:**

Research, passionate advocacy, communication, and limited risk taking were critical keys to success. Councils and managers embraced the research. Strong communication to managers, councils and crew members was and continues to be fundamental. Recognizing that fire response is an inefficient and mostly ineffective solution is essential to become a passionate advocate for the prevention solution.

#### **Conclusions:**

Recognizing that the current fire delivery system in the United States is not sustainable, fire service leaders need to re-invent ourselves. Emergency response will always remain a much needed and required component of our operations; however, just as EMS has supplanted fire response as the number one activity, prevention needs to take a much greater roll. In our experience, we have proven the two can co-exist with an end result of both being more robust.