



## CRR at the National Fire Academy A conversation with Superintendent Tonya Hoover

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- Ed Comeau: You're listening to CRR Radio from the Vision 20/20 Project.
- Ed Comeau: Hi, my name is Ed Comeau from the Vision 20/20 Project and joining us today is a special guest. Chief, could you please introduce yourself?
- Tonya Hoover: Good morning. Tonya Hoover, the new superintendent of the National Fire Academy.
- Ed Comeau: Chief, you have a pretty long career when it comes to fire and emergency services. Could you fill-in our listeners a little bit about your background?
- Tonya Hoover: Sure. Well, I started a while ago and I actually started here back on the east coast with the volunteer fire service. Moved on, then, to go to college. I went to Oklahoma State and obtained my degree at Oklahoma State, and had the opportunity after graduation to transition from the east coast to the west coast where I spent 30 years with the California Fire Service, and also served as a Deputy Fire Marshal at UC Berkeley. I have spent for the majority of my career within that fire prevention community risk reduction area.
- Ed Comeau: That leads me to a pretty basic question. What does CRR mean to you and to the National Fire Academy?
- Tonya Hoover: Well, to me, Community Risk Reduction is about all those facets that reduce risk within our communities and I know no one likes to define a word with the same word, but really Community Risk Reduction is multifaceted. In my mind, it's not just what the fire service has responsibility for or does, but it's what other community partners have responsibility and action for. Whether it be fire, but also those other avenues of emergency mitigation, emergency response, emergency preparedness down to or across to things like fall prevention and child safety. It's multifaceted.
- Ed Comeau: Would it be safe to say that CRR just really is not another word for fire prevention?
- Tonya Hoover: I don't believe CRR is just a word for fire prevention again. This is about Community Risk Reduction and our communities have a variety of risks that they are trying to deal with.



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Ed Comeau: What trends have you seen when it comes to CRR either at the state level or nationally?

Tonya Hoover: I do think there are trends moving across the nation pertaining to CRR. I believe that more jurisdictions, more communities are grabbing hold of the Community Risk Reduction philosophy as well as action plans on Community Risk Reduction. It's not as scary as it was. For the most part, I think the fire service is still taking the lead, but the fire service is recognizing that it's not just fire prevention and so that also causes or helps the fire service to reach into other areas, other partners beyond just their world.

I think the movement is happening. It's like anything "new". It takes some time for it to get legs under it. People need to believe in it. They need to gain that community support for it and I think that's what's happening with CRR especially as the fire services roll within communities, expands beyond just fighting fire.

Ed Comeau: One of the things you did leave out when you went over your career is that you were the California state fire marshal for a number of years, so you had a chance to see first hand how communities across your state implemented CRR. What are some of the challenges they faced?

Tonya Hoover: Well, I think embracing CRR, it can be seen as twofold, two things going there. One, I think when folks look at CRR, you know, Community Risk Reduction, there is the tendency to put it somewhere and so it ends up being placed within the fire department. Only from my experience, if I talk about California, the fire prevention's role is multifaceted. They're doing the community outreach, they're working with their community partners in all different aspects because of their role and responsibility, and things like co-development and inspection services. It goes back to that risk, that preparation response recovery mode, so the fire prevention bureaus are picking all of that up as it is now. Usually, a seat belt or a car seat program gains support through community outreach, fire prevention and maybe a local hospital or another association.

All of those facets of CRR is going into fire prevention. Well, again, when we talked earlier about it's not just about fire prevention and so the need to sell it in the community and also sell your fire service leadership that CRR is more than fire prevention, I think, is what folks the past few years have really been ... I don't want to use the word struggling, but I think really pushing forward on leaning forward is that it's more than fire prevention. We have a role and responsibility beyond what I call the typical fire prevention mission.



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Ed Comeau: Is CRR a part of firefighter safety?

Tonya Hoover: Absolutely. Never want to forget that piece. Again, my [inaudible 00:05:56] when I was the state fire marshal in California, which by the way was an awesome opportunity and I worked with some wonderful people, but my [inaudible 00:06:06] was always the new fire triangle being that prevention operations and training were interconnected. It was a triangle effect with our community in the center. We surround them to protect them and that includes protecting our own, so every aspect of CRR is about protecting our firefighters and helping them meet the firefighter safety initiative.

We don't want to put them in harms way if we don't have to. The job is inherently dangerous as it is. If we can reduce their risk and offer some safety into how our firefighters do their jobs or how any of us do our jobs, that's a piece of CRR.

Ed Comeau: Now I know that you are relatively new at the National Fire Academy, but in the time that you've been there, have you had a chance to get an understanding on how CRR is integrated into the programs?

Tonya Hoover: Absolutely. You're right. I am 60 days. Let's see. On the 14th of July, it will be 60 days into the job, you know, two months and it has been quite a ride, you might say, at learning every aspect of the National Fire Academy, which I think is really important to really fully understand. I've had a great opportunity to work beside Dr. Onieal and Dr. Kirby here as they bring me onboard.

One of the things that are very evident and I think most people don't really maybe not know about the National Academy is that the CRR is embedded in our programs across the board. You can't go to EFO, the Executive Fire Officer program, without having one of those classes be focused on Community Risk Reduction. It focused on an emergency response standpoint, but also it causes those folks in that class in the leadership role to take a look at their communities and what are the true risks and what do they need to address. Talks about data collection, it talks about how to mitigate, so CRR is integrated in our EFO program, our Executive Officer program. It's discussed with our managing officer program and, of course, it is in our fire prevention public education branch of the program as well.

When we talk about CRR, it's internal to the National Fire Academy, but it's also part of our education training partnership branch, which is our external face. In fact, if you look at one of our branches, our branch is called Leadership and



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Community Risk Reduction Branch. So Community Risk Reduction has taken a pretty high level step here at the National Fire Academy.

Ed Comeau: Chief, that's excellent that the NFA has taken a leadership role and helping to integrate CRR into the fire service.

Tonya Hoover: I'm proud to say that was done before I got here. When we talk about the leadership at the National Fire Academy, you know, listening to people, seeing about being involved, understanding the role that the National Fire Academy has or helping our stakeholders, our partners at community risk. If you look at FEMA as a whole, which the National Fire Academy is part of the U.S. Fire Administration, which sits within FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security, you know, FEMA's role is that preparedness, that response, the mitigation recovery.

What we do here folds right up into all of that and so I'm very proud of the fact that the National Fire Academy is taking, and it will continue to hopefully take, that leadership role and be able to help our state and local partners because we all know federal government is a big thing. Nobody knows their communities better than at a local level and at the state level. We want to be able to help them. We want to be able to support them in their missions.

I am so serious when I say, you know, when I look at our branches, and CRR is in a branch, and we talk about it in prevention. Our instructors talk about it here. They know it's part of our mission. To be honest, CRR fits right into FEMA's mission and it talks about the ability to mitigate and to respond, and to recover. It's all of those things and that's what CRR is kind of wrapping its arms around. It's like that umbrella, so it's exciting when I get to talk about it.

Ed Comeau: Are you working to promote CRR upwards into FEMA?

Tonya Hoover: Well, I would say we ... When we do something here, it's really important that it tied to the strategic plan for the U.S. Fire Administration, but again, recognizing that we are part of FEMA and FEMA's mission is to support the citizens and first responders. When you hear that, support citizens and first responders, I go, "Oh, wait a second. What's the role of the U.S. Fire Administration?" Right? We are talking about building, sustaining, improving capabilities, preparing for, protecting against, responding, recovery, mitigation. Doesn't it sound a lot like CRR?

I think it's a great opportunity to align missions and align strategic plans. We have a more ... When it comes to our training delivery here, we have an



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outward face where EMI has more of an inward. Well, they also have an outward face, but it's a combination. We're more of a outward face holistically, but I think there's opportunity to take CRR and push it up into FEMA because they talk about mitigation of all hazards. What is CRR? It's all hazards.

Ed Comeau: Do you see more CRR adoption at the state level among the state fire marshals and state fire academies?

Tonya Hoover: I think so and understanding a little how states work. My perspective is when I looked at California, Community Risk Reduction was entering the revision of curricula. Again, remembering where those mandates for that curricula come from and it even starts at a different level. When you look at Community Risk Reduction being grabbed by folks like NFPA and ICC, and some of the other larger organizations, non-profit organizations that are grabbing hold of that Community Risk Reduction.

When Community Risk Reduction is mentioned in a national standard, a performance standard, a professional qualification, a delivery that then gets pushed into the state system because of the state. That's the minimum standard of care, so the states pick that up. We, here at the National Fire Academy, want to help the states integrate that into their systems as well. It could be challenging. There is a lot to be placed on a state training establishment to try to get all of this into their curricula, get it delivered, but we want to be here and help. If they can't do it, we want to be able to help them by offering those type of classes whether they be a two, a six, or a two-week, being able to partner with them on a delivery that maybe they can't do at a state level, so it's really a team approach.

Ed Comeau: You touched upon data earlier. Just how important is data when it comes to CRR?

Tonya Hoover: Data is very important to CRR. How do I know what my community risks are, how they impact my community if I don't know what's going on in the community? The only way to determine that is to take a look at that data that gets collected at all different levels. When we talk about data collected, a lot of times within a fire service, we go right to [inaudible 00:14:17] or we go to our state and local data collection system. There are other ways to collect that data. Whether you're doing it through National Health Associations or you're doing it through census information, there are multiple ways to get data layers to help you look at your community.



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Again, when you're forced to work outside your box, you build these relationships. Community Risk Reduction is about the community building the relationship, so data is very important to determine the road map, what am I gonna do.

Ed Comeau: When you look into your crystal ball, what do you see for the future of CRR?

Tonya Hoover: Boy, crystal balls are scary, which is probably why I don't own one. I do see CRR picking up steam. Part of the reasons for that are, one, that it's being identified at a national level within standards as being important and something that is really part of the fabric of what we do. The other fold is, I think, it's forcing communities to look at risk reduction. There's not a lot of money and so what money we do have, we need to use it sensibly. We need to evaluate, continuously evaluate, what our public, what our communities need. I think what's happening is CRR is a mechanism to help point folks.

Again, like anything, we talk about it being new. Well, it's actually been around for a while. It just gets called different things. It was bifurcated in different locations, but it's really growing legs. It's like any business. We talk about that five-year cycle in a business and it takes some time for folks to grab hold of "a new idea", but I think folks are grabbing hold of this new idea, which is why you're seeing it in nationally recognized standards and states are talking about it in their delivery of classes or development of curriculum.

I think it's going to continue. It's important for those involved in CRR to keep their eye on the ball, keep it moving forward because, again, it is a continuous cycle. You can't just do it and say, "I did it," and let it go. It's that whole cycle of development and evaluation.

Ed Comeau: Well, we've been talking with Chief Tonya Hoover who's the new superintendent down at the National Fire Academy about her perspective on CRR. Chief, I really appreciate taking the time out to talk with us today on CRR Radio.

Tonya Hoover: It is my pleasure and I wish everybody the best of luck. It was great to talk with you, Ed.

Ed Comeau: To learn more about Community Risk Reduction and the Vision 20/20 Project, be sure to visit us at [www.strategicfire.org](http://www.strategicfire.org)