



Presentation Title: The London approach to fire safety visits

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I. Formative Evaluation – Planning

Part of the preventative efforts of the London Fire Brigade (LFB) have been to focus on the home fire safety visit (HFSV). In the early days (from 2003) this involved firefighters visiting homes regardless of risk. Londoners were encouraged to contact the LFB on a free telephone number and book a free HFSV. The development of the P1 postcode and P1 person concept moved the LFB from a volume approach to a targeted approach. These concepts use a combination of MOSAIC lifestyle data, fire data, demographic profiling and a range of risk factors such as smoking, drinking and mobility impairment. The intention of this targeting is to focus on those homes where the risk of fire is thought to be higher; given the size of London, LFB will only ever reach a very small percentage of households, so targeting based on risk is critical.

II. Process Evaluation – Implementation

LFB started carrying out HFSVs in 2003. The numbers of HFSVs were boosted by grants from central government from 2004-8 which gave London a grant of 1 million pounds to promote this approach. The number of HFSVs rose from 2,197 in 2003/4 to 44,649 by the end of the four year grant period.

By 2012/13 LFB carried out over 78,000 HFSVs. It continues to set itself stretching targets through its own corporate plan – the Integrated Risk Management Plan, as required by statute. In the recently published plan for the three years to March 2016, LFB aims to complete 219,000 more visits, with 8 out of 10 of them targeted at those most at risk of fire (the P1 person).

III. Impact Evaluation – Short Term Results

In 2012 LFB commissioned an external evaluation into the effectiveness of HFSVs. The analysis was based on data for individual homes that received or experienced an HFSV in the six and a half years from January 2006. It confirmed that homes which received an HFSV were less likely to experience an accidental dwelling fire than those that did not. The rate of fire for those homes which received an HFSV was ten times lower than those that did not. Interestingly the severity of fire experienced by those who did have an HFSV previously was lower than those who had no HFSV history. This is thought to be because the alarm is raised earlier, because of raised awareness and the presence of smoke alarms.

The evaluation also sets out cost savings to the London economy as a result of the HFSV programme over this period. This is rather complex to explain here but is set out in the committee paper from July 2013 (FEP 2085) which is publicly available and provided as part of this symposium.

IV. Outcome Evaluation – Long Term Results

Looking at the last five years, fire injuries have reduced by 25 per cent and fire fatalities have decreased, as a ten year average from 64 to 55. This is good news until you look at dwelling fires. London has seen its dwelling fires remain stable at around 6000 per year. This figure is proving hard to budge despite the efforts of the HFSV programme. The 2012 evaluation showed that homes that received an HFSV experienced only 2 accidental dwelling fires per 10,000 population against 20 for homes that did not. LFB plans to reduce the number of accidental dwelling fires by 2 per cent (or 8 per cent as a stretch target) by March 2016. This is very much work in progress.

Recommendations for others:

1. Work out what your elected officers want – is it a numbers game or is it something less tangible acceptable?
2. What resources do you have to commit to a preventative approach to home fire safety? Are uniformed officers the most cost effective approach? What is to be gained from partners or non-uniformed officers?
3. Think hard at the start about what success looks like. If it's just about numbers, be sure to agree metrics and consistently collect, collate and report on data on a regular basis. If it is more qualitative, determine how that will be collected and if your time lines are reasonable to draw any firm conclusions especially about causality.
4. Money. Money. Money. What's it going to cost in real terms? Be sure to calculate all costs and not just the obvious ones. Determine the timeline for any cost recovery and be sure to be confident of cause and effect.
5. Data. Data. Data. Collect it consistently and be prepared to be challenged. Be robust.
6. If you do all of this you should be in a position to defend your prevention budget when economic times are bad and you are under the spotlight. Be prepared to be scrutinized – your data and your upfront planning will benefit you hugely here.

Conclusions:

Many thousands of Londoners are now safer as a result of the investment in HFSVs made by the UK Government and the London Fire Brigade. HFSVs are just one part in the prevention toolkit needed by fire services to reduce accidental dwelling fires in the home. It is all very much work in progress.