Barriers to Maintaining Working Smoke Alarms

The Multi-Family Housing Fire Reduction Program

Presented by:
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Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue (Oregon)
Goal

- To reduce fire & life safety issues in multi-family/apartment communities
Decade of Fire History
Headlines

Fire kills three children, leaves families homeless

Investigators say one of the youths started the blaze with a lighter

By TOM MORLAN

OF The Spokesman

Three young children perished in a three-alarm fire that engulfed a building at the Autumn Park apartments on Thursday evening. Killed were Larry Pattee, 5, Christopher Pattee, 5, and Ashley Pattee, 4 months. Examiner said and Pattee woke up to a room filled with smoke.

Washburn said Pattee ran out of the house and left a sliding glass door open behind him. Minutes later, Pattee and his neighbors tried to rescue the children, but intense heat and smoke prevented anyone from getting inside the building.

Washburn said officials were too hot to enter the building's electrical system, but they might have failed when flames melted the wires. Pattee, among the first to arrive at the scene, said Pattee seemed to be paralyzed as the fire spread throughout the four-unit building.

"There was a five-minute period when he could have done something," Privol said. "It looked like he'd just woke up."

Shortly after Privol arrived, he said Pattee went around to the back of the first-floor apartment to see if they could get to the children. Privol said he saw Ashley lying motionless in the living room.

"There was so much flame that you couldn't have seen anything." Privol said.

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Aloha fire likely arson

Faulty alarms and a burst hydrant hamper efforts to fight the blaze that kills 8
The Turning Point

- 3-Alarm/ Bonita Villa apartments (2000)
- Fatal fire with 100 residents displaced
- Evaluated the smoke alarms
- 64% of the homes had non-working smoke alarms
- One month later...over 50% were disabled
The Question

- Was it our Message or the Messenger?
The Research

- Secured a grant
- Campbell & DeLong Resources, Inc.
  - Demographic study
  - Focus groups on the smoke alarm
    - Two communities with fatal fires
    - Beaverton Welcoming Center
- The Maris Agency, Inc.
  - Key messages
  - Public Awareness Campaign
    - Educational pieces
The Key Messages

- Language & cultural barriers must be addressed:
  - Not familiar with the smoke alarm (especially if new to the US)
  - A family- and community-driven culture
- Provide the “Why” to all targeted groups
- Illiteracy
The Messenger

- A new partner - the landlord, manager and/or owner
- Hold trainings
- Conduct annual inspections
- Explain the educational tools
Educational Tools

- Pictorials
  - Two-sided, Bilingual
Educational Tools
Educational Tools

- Smoke alarm display panel
Educational Tools

- Posters
- Magnets
Educational Tools

(Outside)

La mayoría de las fatalidades causadas por de incendios ocurren cuando usted está durmiendo

¿Funciona su alarma?
Las alarmas para detectar el humo fueron hechas con el propósito de despertarle a usted y a su familia durante la noche que es cuando ocurren la mayoría de las fatalidades causadas por incendios.

Most fire deaths happen when you’re sleeping

Is your smoke alarm working?
Smoke alarms are made to wake you and your family in the night when most fire deaths happen.

¡No desconecte el ruido!
La alarma es el último vínculo con vida.

Keep it noisy!
For you and your family.
Educational Tools

- Bus
- Radio
Program Evaluation

- Are we reaching the audience?
- Are the messages resonating?
- Are we helping to create behavioral changes – are attendees taking action?

Baselines & Trends
  - Long-term
Program to Date

- 18 workshops
- 46,000 residents
- 19,000 units
Program to Date

- Communities in attendance
  - 70% have not experienced a fire
  - 30% have had a fire

- Fire Significance
  - Occurred less than 2% of the time in those communities that have been trained
Our Goal

- To spread this research & concept to other fire departments
  - This is do-able regardless of the size of your organization
In their own words…