

NATIONAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC FIRE EDUCATION MANAGERS – ATTITUDES TOWARD PREVENTION MATERIALS AND HOME SAFETY VISITS

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National Survey of Public Fire Education Managers– Attitudes Toward Prevention Materials and Home Safety Visits

Prepared for:

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NATIONAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC FIRE EDUCATION MANAGERS – ATTITUDES TOWARD PREVENTION MATERIALS AND HOME SAFETY VISITS

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It was prepared by TriData.

Executive Summary

A survey of 374 public education managers in U.S. fire departments found that half had a program they considered as community risk reduction (CRR). But only about 10% of their departments were making home visits systematically, as opposed to responding to the occasional request. The main reasons for not having a home visit program were not having someone to manage it, and being concerned about liability.

About 93% of the respondents said they were using some nationally available prevention materials. The leading reasons given by these and the other managers or not using available free materials was

- Concern about their cost (often misperceived); and
- Desire to use materials with their own logo.

Other reasons given included:

- Too many materials to use all
- Don't cover relevant topics
- Not targeted to the right audience
- Difficulty in downloading them
- Difficulty in reproducing them in mass quantity
- The cover too much in one document
- Schools say they are too busy to use the materials.

Introduction

In 2014 two prevention-related surveys were developed under a grant from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program that was awarded to the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE) Vision 20/20 project. One survey was to determine firefighter attitudes toward prevention.¹; The second survey, the subject of this report, was to assess opinions of public fire education managers toward the nationally available prevention materials, and to find out if their communities had community risk reduction programs, whether they used home fire safety visits.

POPULATION SURVEYED – A request to participate in this survey and links to it were disseminated to fire service organizations nationally, using the following resources:

- Vision 20/20 email list
- FEMA Assistance to Firefighter Grants Program mailing list
- CRRNet
- EPARADE and NFLSE, two email groups focusing on life safety and code issues
- Fire Service trade media
- National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) on-line newsletter
- State fire associations
- Social media

¹ The firefighter survey was reported in a separate report to IFE Vision 20/20 project, dated May 2015.

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- State fire marshals (some of whom passed on the survey request to their own mailing lists)

About a third of the respondents said they heard of the survey via Vision 20/20; the rest were spread across the other sources.

The respondents were a broad national sample, but not a purely random sample. They self-determined their participation.

The respondents entered their answers on-line via a Survey Monkey questionnaire that also was used to tally the results. The survey took about 5-10 minutes to complete. The data from the responses is summarized below.

RESPONDENT PROFILE- While this was not a pure random sample, the respondents were well distributed demographically. Of the 450 respondents who answered the first question, on how they heard about the survey, only 66 did not go further in the survey. There were 360-390 respondents who answered the other questions; depending on the question. Of these, 374 were public fire education managers, which was the target audience.

In the sections below, “respondents” mean the ones who went beyond the first question. The respondents came from 302 fire departments and 12 state fire marshal offices or other agencies in 42 states.

While we requested that just the person serving as the manager of public education respond for their department, there were 49 departments for which two or more people responded. It is possible that in some departments, there may indeed be more than one person responsible for public education who did not know the other was answering, such as a head of public education who reported to a fire marshal who also responded. The multiple responses give a little more weight to the responses of 15% of the departments surveyed.

California had the most responses, as expected based on population. There were no public educator manager respondents from eight states:

- Louisiana
- North Dakota
- Nebraska
- New Mexico
- Rhode Island
- Utah
- Vermont
- West Virginia

The fact that there were no responses from these states should not be interpreted as a lack of interest or activity. Since this was not a randomized survey, it could be simply that the information about the

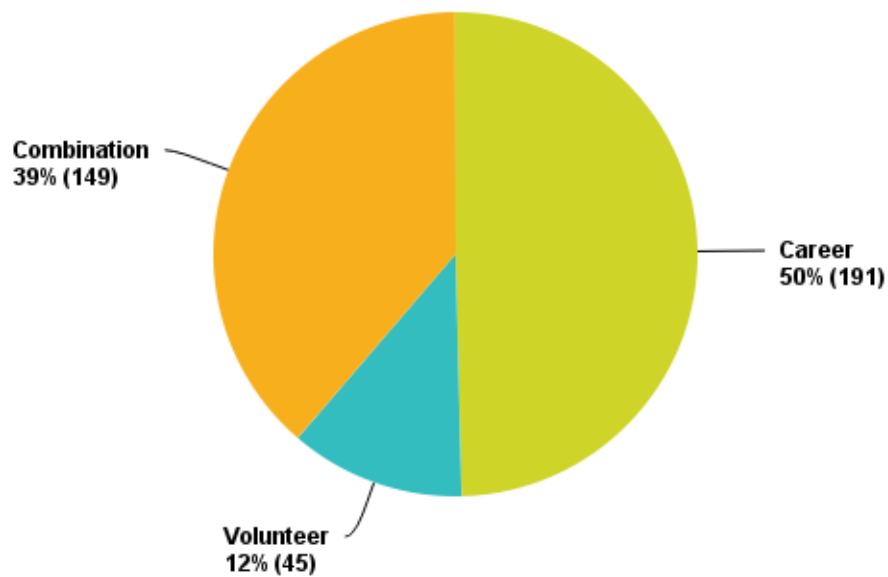
survey was not widely distributed in these states. Some states had disproportionately low participation relative to population (e.g. New York and New Jersey.) Some had much higher than expected participation (Kentucky, North Carolina, New Hampshire.)

Observations from the survey include:

- All population sizes were represented, from metro cities to small towns and rural districts.
- Almost half of the responses (49%) were from career departments, with 40% from combination departments and 12% from volunteers.

Q5 3. Type of department

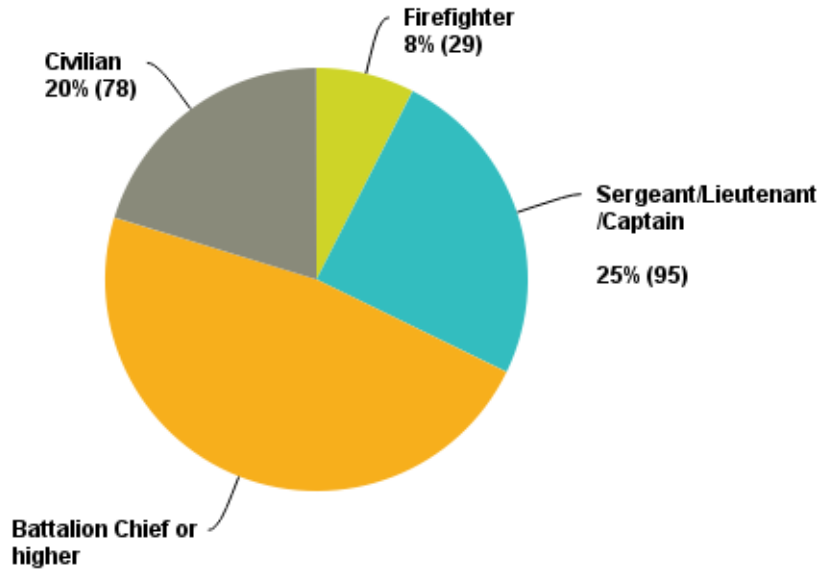
Answered: 385 Skipped: 75



- Half (49%) of respondents were battalion chiefs or higher; a fifth (21%) were civilian.

Q6 4. Rank

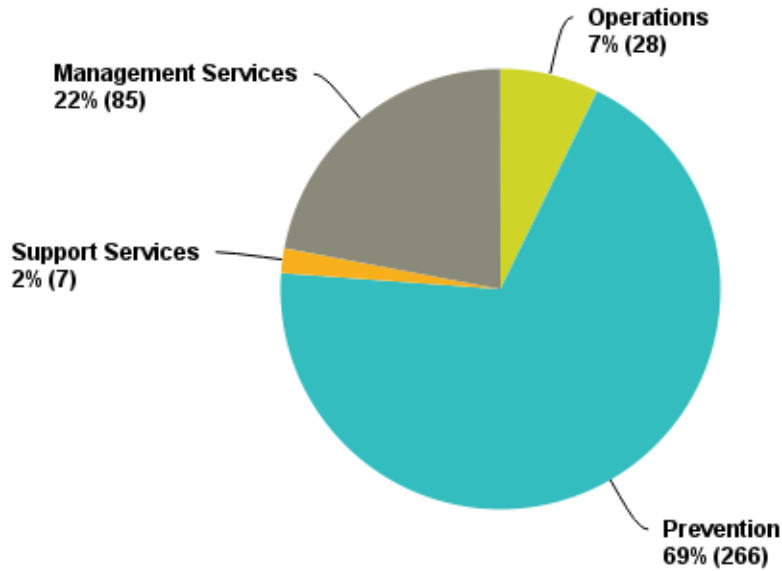
Answered: 385 Skipped: 75



- Public education management was entrusted to experienced personnel in most of the agencies responding; 57% had more than 20 years of service, 26% had 11-20 years.
- A quarter of respondents were female, three-quarters male. (This was not surprising, because a much higher percentage of public fire education managers are female than managers of other fire department functions.)
- Two-thirds of respondents said their primary assignment was prevention; one-quarter said it was management. Presumably many of those listing management had prevention under them, though we did not ask that explicitly, and perhaps should have, in retrospect.

Q9 7. Current primary assignment

Answered: 386 Skipped: 74



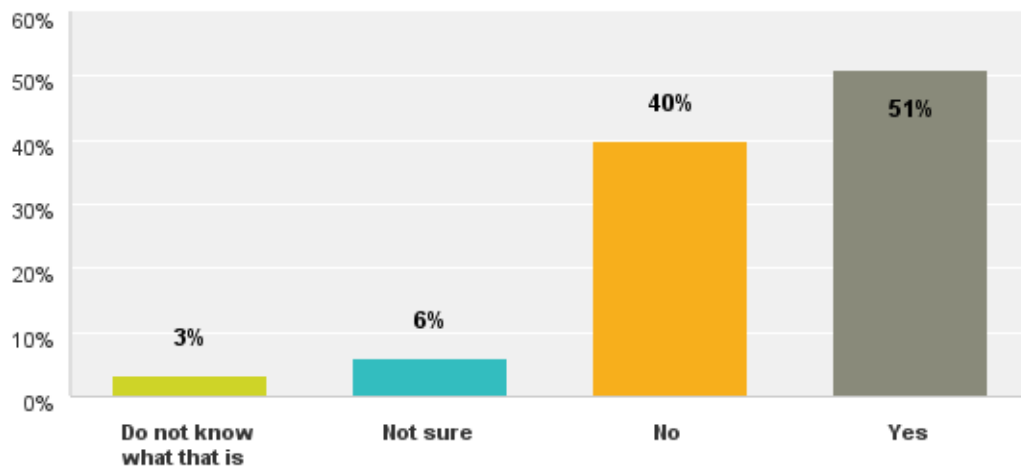
- Overall, this was a very good distribution of respondents, without any major skewing, even though not a random sample.

FINDINGS-

- 1. Community Risk Reduction (CRR) Programs:** Slightly more than half of the respondents (**51%**) said their department had a CRR program. 40% said no. Only 3% said they did not know what CRR is (which suggests that the concept is at least recognized by the majority). There might be a bias here in that those motivated to take the survey might be more aware of CRR. Still, that level of awareness among hundreds of respondents is encouraging.

Q11 9. Does your fire department have an ongoing Community Risk Reduction (CRR) program?

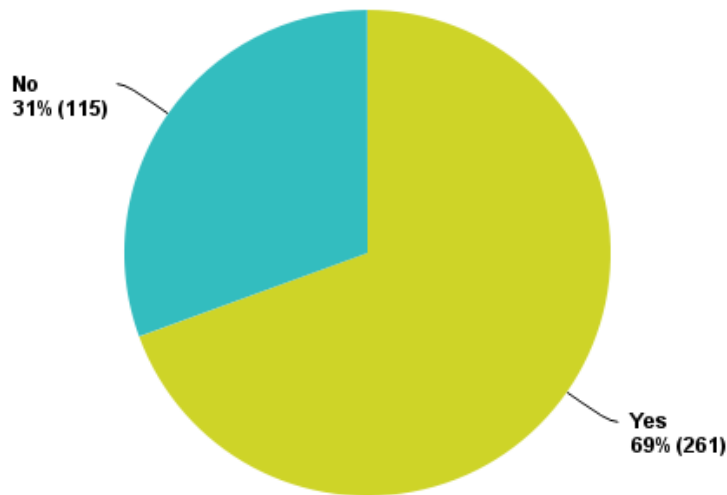
Answered: 377 Skipped: 83



- 2. Home Fire Safety Visits:** Almost three quarters (**69%**) said their departments made home visits. However, the majority did them only upon request, not proactively.

Q12 10. Has your fire department made home fire safety visits inside homes or apartments?

Answered: 376 Skipped: 84

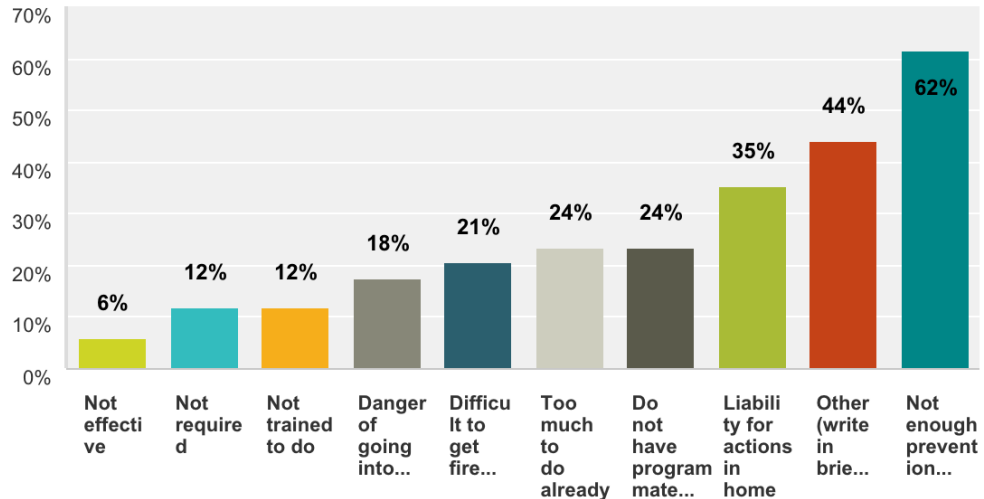


Only 14% of those departments making home visits said they made them as part of a regular home visit program, which is about 10% of the total respondents. However, that the majority of departments did at least some home visits may make it easier for them to establish an expanded program—the ice has been broken. Three-quarters of the communities making home visits used at least some prevention staff for making them home visits, but two-thirds (64%) also said they used line firefighters for making at least some of the visits. So, while home safety visits are not yet widely used within most communities, **precedent exists in a majority of them to have firefighters do at least some of the visits**. Again, the ice has been broken, and that provides a potential base to build upon to get more firefighters involved.

Why no home visits? The leading reason given for not making more home visits) was lack of sufficient prevention staff to manage the program (reported by 64% of the communities lacking a home visit program).

If No or Not sure, why? (Check all that apply.)

Answered: 34 Skipped: 426



Answer Choices	Responses	
Not effective	6%	2
Not required	12%	4
Not trained to do	12%	4
Danger of going into homes	18%	6
Difficult to get firefighters to do	21%	7
Too much to do already	24%	8
Do not have program materials or kit to do	24%	8
Liability for actions in home	35%	12
Other (write in briefly)	Responses 44%	15
Not enough prevention staff to manage	62%	21

Total Respondents: 34

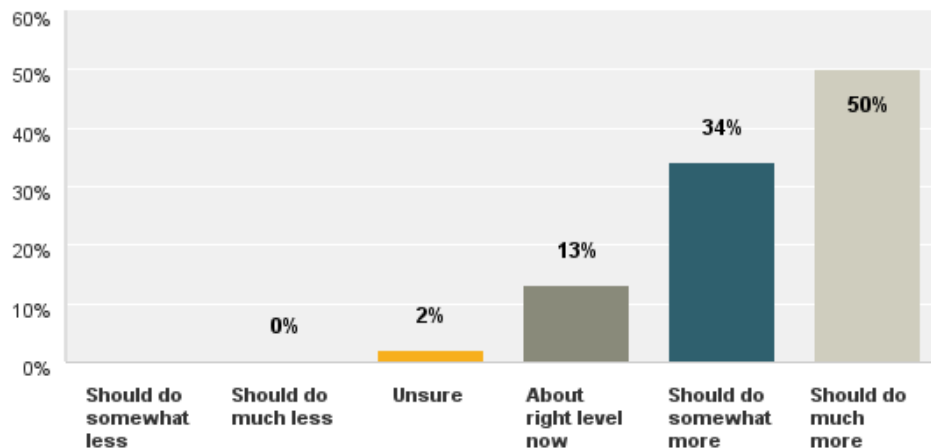
There are several approaches to overcome this real or perceived barrier. First make clear just what level of effort is needed to manage a home visit program, so it is not visualized as more than what it actually takes. Second, increase awareness of the free [Vision 20/20 guide \(www.homesafetyvisit.org\)](http://www.homesafetyvisit.org) on how to run the program, which will make it easier and require less time to manage the program, by not having to figure out for yourself out the steps to run the program. Other things to consider for increasing CRR programs are reviewing other prevention tasks to determine their relative effectiveness and priority; and the potential importance of adding one person in prevention to manage a home visit program.

The second leading reason given for not making home visits (in 40% of the departments without them) was a concern about liability. This is a perception that is important to know and underscores the need for communication from Vision 20/20 and others to inform the fire service that there has not been a liability problem with home visits, and that it can be further assuaged by having the resident sign a waiver about the free smoke alarms given to their household. It also may be possible to obtain inexpensive insurance against such lawsuits, however unlikely.

3. Should your department do **more or less prevention**? Not surprisingly, 85% of public education managers thought their department should be doing more prevention. Only 13% thought the current level was about right.

Q20 12. Do you think your fire department should be doing more or less prevention (including public education) than it does?

Answered: 369 Skipped: 91



4. **Use of national prevention materials.** A total of 92% of the public fire education managers said they used nationally available prevention materials from NFPA, USFA, Red Cross or others. Almost three-fourths, 74%, said they also develop their own materials, which is addressed by the new Vision 20/20 tool (planned for release in September 2015) for generating locally customized materials. Existence of the new kit might also be communicated to the 26% of the public education managers who said they *don't* make their own materials; more might develop materials tailored to their community if it were easier and cheaper to do so.

The majority (about 55%), said there were *several* national materials that were highly useful in their communities. More than a quarter of the public fire education heads said that they found *many* national prevention materials useful. Only 15% said *few* are useful.

When asked for the reasons they do not use some of the nationally available materials, almost half (45%) said it was because of cost. That suggests that USFA, NFPA, Red Cross and others might better advertise which materials are free or inexpensive, so their lack of use is not due to a misperception that the materials are expensive. This also suggests that organizations charging for prevention materials might consider their cost elasticity—the tradeoff between lower cost and selling more. The second most common reason for not using some of the national materials is a preference to create materials with the department’s own logo. This suggests that national organization should make clear when it is OK to add the local logo, and to facilitate doing so.

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Answer Choices	Responses
Cost of the materials	45% 157
Prefer to create own materials with department's logo on them	26% 92
Other (write in briefly) Responses	21% 73
Too many to use all	19% 67
For school materials—teachers/schools are too busy to use	19% 65
Not targeted to the right audience	15% 54
Cannot download or print in quantity	15% 52
Do not cover relevant topics desired	12% 41
Other materials seem better	11% 39
Do not know how to obtain them	11% 37
Cover too much in one piece	11% 37
Too much fire and not enough other safety topics covered	9% 30
Not available in other languages	8% 28
Too long	7% 23
Not attractive	6% 20
Difficult to read (small print size)	5% 17
No time to use	5% 17
Not enough pictures	4% 15
Time it takes to learn about new materials	4% 15
Not proven effective	4% 13
Ethnically biased	3% 12
Too simplistic	3% 11
Hard to understand	2% 7
Do not know how to use	1% 5
Do not trust or like the organization issuing it	1% 2
Total Respondents: 349	

Other reasons for not using some national materials include:

- There are too many to use all
- They don't cover relevant topics
- They are not targeted the right audience
- There is difficulty in downloading them, or difficulty in reproducing them in quantity
- They cover too much in one piece
- For school-oriented materials, some schools say they are too busy to use the materials.

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Some illuminating comments below were written in to the survey questionnaire:

- “People don’t read much printed material anymore”
- “Many national materials are dated”
- “People react better when our logo is on the material”
- “Don’t like having to use passwords to download”
- “As a volunteer, don’t have time to use the materials”
- We hope that with these added insights, more public education managers can be persuaded to use home safety visits, and that those who develop nationally used prevention materials can make them more useful.