



Presentation Title: Community Risk Reduction as a Department Cultural Change Tool

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I. Formative Evaluation – Planning

A series of environmental elements led to an organizational push to bring Community Risk Reduction (CRR) into Richland Fire & Emergency Services (RF&ES). An internal department survey revealed that 53% of the department's personnel had an interest in leaving the department. Attitudes and production within the department had become poor. Furthermore, complaints from patient contacts had increased significantly and internal frustration was escalating.

II. Process Evaluation – Implementation

Utilize the National Fire Academy's (NFA) *Leadership Strategies for Community Risk Reduction* course as a change agent to impact the work environment. This class was initially attended by one of the department's upwardly progressive firefighters. Additionally, the department's future chief had exposure to CRR while part of the NFA's Executive Fire Officer program. Seeing the potential value of this course at a greater level, a movement was made to send strategic groups of department members to this course as a way to facilitate a cultural change within the organization. This led to a total of 35% of the organization attending this course and assisted in shifting the organization's mindset beyond traditional methods of service. During this time three of the department's members also attended the NFA's *Conducting Local Risk Reduction by Company Officers* in order to deepen their knowledge of CRR.

III. Impact Evaluation – Short-Term Results

It was the belief of the chief officers that along with the CRR courses utilized to change the culture of the organization, the next biggest impact would be a change in the entry-level and promotional process of the department. Currently, RF&ES has a workforce that is consistently seeking new and innovative ways to impact the community at multiple levels. The addition of an annual community risk profile began last year which focuses on six specific areas. They include: serving the outward growth of the community, wildland-urban interface, serving an aging population, community water recreation assessment, and a youth mentoring initiative.

Entry-level firefighters reported that in their experiences at various Fire/EMS department oral interview panels they left with a feeling that RF&ES wanted and focused on how they fit into the current work environment and their personalities, not how good of a firefighter or paramedic they are. Questions that focused on how the department could impact the community beyond traditional Fire/EMS roles became part of the process.

The department's promotional process has shifted its primary focus away from the traditional fire officer mindset to include elements of leadership trait profiling, emotional intelligence, community involvement, and oral presentation. As well, a battalion chief has been tasked with conducting a series of workshops that focus on preparing the department's future chief officers and current leaders to carry the department into the future. This was brought about because the five chief officers of the department will be retired within seven years. These "sustainability workshops" will prepare the next group of chief officers to be prepared for their future roles prior to taking their promotion as opposed to learning on the job.

IV. Outcome Evaluation – Long-Term Results

The last five years has seen the strongest group of new hires in such a short period of time. This is significant due to the fact that 38% of the departments 60 members have five years or less of service with RF&ES. The department has become a healthy flourishing fire and EMS organization. The department is often referred to as the "the only department I have applied to" by candidates. Patient complaints have been next to non-existent for years and citizen compliments are received often. The city's businesses, stakeholders, and citizens continue to approach the department with new ways to involve the department in any number of events. The department is successfully facilitating a reading/mentoring program, titled "Fired Up to Read", for the third straight year at the cities demographically poorest elementary school. The department opened its fourth fire station two years ago and is in place to open a fifth in the next couple of years. Partnerships with the community's biggest stakeholders continue to strengthen and develop. Additionally, during this time we have welcomed a new fire chief that is committed to bringing the department to its highest level possible and see a change in 33% of its personnel through retirements and new hires.

Recommendations for others:

With a department culture that is focused on CRR, your organization will create equity within those you serve. Partnerships with key community stakeholders will ensure the department is able to sustain itself into the future. Explore the current mindset and culture within your given department and seek the available resources to foster a department that is truly determined to reduce the risk in your community. It is a mindset of being proactive versus reactive that will push the department's members to seek new and innovative ways to help the citizens and communities they work for.

Conclusions:

With a solid CRR foundation in place, RF&ES's position within the community is stronger than ever. City department heads now consider the fire department's needs and roles during future planning and development. Lastly, the department's budget is being adjusted to accommodate CRR needs as it expands and broadens.