

Speaker 1: Welcome to CRR Radio from the Vision 20/20 Project.

Ed Comeau: Welcome to CRR Radio. My name's Ed Comeau with the Vision 20/20 Project, and today's going to be the second part of a two-part series we're doing with Joe Powers from Henrico County Division of Fire, focusing on the side effects of CRR. In part one, we talked about the internal effects. Well in this episode, we're going to talk about the external effects of CRR.

So why don't we jump right into it, Joe. You had talked on the last broadcast that CRR is more than just code enforcement and public education. Can you talk about that again and expand upon it?

Joe Powers: Sure. Community risk reduction is not a section of the fire department in its truest sense. It's not fire prevention, and it's not this sense of code enforcement and public education brought together, which gives a department the sense of having community risk reduction ingrained. Public education and code enforcement may be portions of what community risk reduction is, but community risk reduction really is an organization's approach to matching the risk that's been identified within the specific neighborhoods of a community.

When we understand the community as a whole, we realize that there's pockets within those communities. Those pockets may be neighborhoods, and within those neighborhoods, that's a small population within a larger community, obviously. Now within that neighborhood or within that smaller population, a lot of times we can see that there are specific or common characteristics to the people that live within those communities or within those small neighborhoods, and we can start to understand the risk that's associated with that area. And that's really what community risk reduction is all about. It's really getting into the weeds of what we think we know about a neighborhood or a community or our county as a whole, and diving in deeper to really make sure that we have an understanding through data and through partnerships that what the risk is in that community is something that we can now start to develop programs and activities and start to change the behaviors of those people within those communities.

The traditional fire service, as we all know it, has been very, very reactive to our environment. That's how we all grew up in the fire service, is when the alarm rings we go put out a fire, and we teach kids how to just stop, drop and roll, and we deployed programs into neighborhoods after a fire occurred to canvas to put smoke alarms in. And those are all reactionary activities. And a lot of times we were providing, and we still do, providing programs that are a one size fits all to an entire county, like fire prevention week does for us sometimes, like a fourth grade education program does for a school system.

But when you match the ideas and the theories behind community risk reduction, you may find that fire prevention week ends up being five or six different programs deployed to populations or communities. You might find that your fourth grade education really has different focuses depending on the school or depending on the

communities that the school services. And that's really what community risk reduction is all about.

Ed Comeau: And you use the word traditional, our tradition, which is very big obviously in the fire service. In this day and age, we're just seeing a lot of non-traditional risks out there, aren't we? And one that really pops to mind is the opioid epidemic that everybody's dealing with. Certainly the fire department deals with the follow to that, but more and more fire departments are getting involved proactively up front to try to address the non-traditional risks, aren't they?

Joe Powers: Yeah, absolutely. And a lot of times there's an opportunity for fire departments to partner with agencies to really decrease workload, like we talked a little bit about in the last episode. When we partner with folks and we start to see these non-traditional risks and we start to provide non-traditional services, it doesn't always have to be the fire department that provides those services. A lot of times it can be our partners that provide the services based on the risks that we help them identify.

Ed Comeau: I see more departments go into the sort of situation where somebody who is an addict comes in the door, while the fire department might take care of the immediate situation there, they're able to transfer them or refer them on to other agencies. But that's only really possible if the fire department has built those relationships in advance, isn't it?

Joe Powers: Yeah, absolutely. Every community is different, and bringing the community to the fire station or taking the fire station personnel to the community, it really all depends on what the risk is in that community. And without having those good partnerships and having an understanding of the community and having that self-assessment like we talked about in the last episode, understanding our own capacity as a department, it's really hard to provide that top-notch service to the community that they deserve.

Ed Comeau: And these may be things you didn't even think about if you didn't have that partnership. It's just focusing on different areas of the fire department it's not used to focusing on.

Joe Powers: Yeah. And it really attaches to that all-hazards deployment model that we've come accustomed to. But again, I stress that not all the time does it have to be the fire department providing the services. Sometimes it's the partners. Our partners just need to have an understanding of what risks are being presented to the community, or being presented to the fire department through the community, and helping them provide some resources and some programs back to the community.

Ed Comeau: It can remove some of the duplication of services too, can't it? There may be other agencies doing what you're doing, or maybe they're able to do it better just because of their background.

Joe Powers: Our elected officials love when duplication of services is identified and mitigated within agencies through partnership. If we can increase our efficiency at a local government level and provide that service to the community at a lower cost, both in personnel and funding, it's going to be a win for all of us.

Ed Comeau: And this might get into the issue of outcomes versus outputs, and this also gets back to the whole idea of data and everything else, these programs really help you identify the difference and the impact, don't they?

Joe Powers: Yeah, absolutely. It really does.

Traditionally, the fire service has always worked in a silo, and we've worked in an area where we think that we know what the community's risk is, and we know what the programs that we need to provide are, and we think that the way we report our activities is the right way to go. The fire service has really been full of great ideas that are really unimpeded by an outsider's perspective, which can be great in very small, limited circumstances, but typically without having those outsider perspectives through partnerships, a lot of times we're not providing the community with the services that they really need. And that's where community risk reduction really drives to identify and remove those barriers between agencies and create good partnerships.

Ed Comeau: As we had mentioned the last episode, partnerships are so vitally important in terms of achieving a common outcome, isn't it?

Joe Powers: Yeah, it really is. Because if we work together, our workload obviously will be decreased. We'll increase our efficiency, and we're going to be working toward common goals that provide a true benefit to our community, and we have the ability to start focusing on those community outcomes like you mentioned earlier, and really jumping away from looking at outputs as a means for reporting our activities.

When we start thinking in the form of outcomes rather than outputs, we're able to start looking at, let's say commercial fires in a completely different way. Rather than thinking about the number of commercial fires that we ran last year over a given period of time, we can start looking at the tax revenue that we sustained through having a fire department that's able to respond quickly and mitigate incidents. We can also look at the job savings that occur. Outcomes are really the things that people care about. Outputs make pretty graphs a lot of times, but when it comes down to what elected officials and our community leaders are looking for, they're really looking for outcomes.

And of course outcomes are not all that easy to obtain. It takes a little bit of work. But we can understand if we have the right partnerships and the right relationships with our county's revenue department or a city's revenue department, and we create relationships with our business community, we can go out and find out how many jobs were saved because we kept a fast food restaurant from burning, and we can understand about how much money the county or the city incurs through taxes, meals taxes, property taxes, or even business property tax. That's what our elected officials love to see.

We can also look at how we deploy a neighborhood school program to educate kids on cooking fires, how that decreased fires within the neighborhoods for which that school services. Because a lot of times kids are the ones that have the most influence over parents' activities. And when we talk about safe cooking habits, not leaving the kitchen,

not laying on the couch while you're cooking, those kids can really provide some behavioral change within those apartment complexes.

And instead of looking at emergency management activities like classes about hurricane preparation or storm preparation, we can actually look at the decline or the increase, depending on what the outcome of that program is supposed to be, we can look at the decline in shelter use in our own jurisdiction, and then we can start to compare that to other jurisdictions use of shelters with similar characteristics.

Ed Comeau: Is it kind of the case ... as I'm listening to you talk, what's going through my mind is, is the fire service, through CRR, learning to talk the talk that city officials are used to? Are city officials more used to the outcome world versus we've been more used to the output world? And is more of an alignment of the two worlds talking a common language?

Joe Powers: Yeah, I believe so. Because I think that, like I said earlier, we've worked on our own silos for so long, and we've said that we were the fire department and this is the way that we do things. When we start working with city and county officials that understand government efficiency and start to understand the fire department and the way that we work, a lot of times if we don't talk the right talk and explain our services in the right way, we look a lot like a liability rather than an investment, because emergency response running up and down the road is a government expense.

Where we can reframe our activities and start to ingest community risk reduction and spread it throughout our organization, and we start to implement resiliency within our communities, we start to implement prevention, and that becomes a community investment. And that's really where elected officials are looking for activity. Rather than being an expense, we need to show the elected officials that we're an investment for our community, and we can visualize that the most through using outcomes rather than outputs.

Ed Comeau: Well on that note, I think we're gonna wrap up our two-part series here. We've been talking with Joe Powers, who is a captain with the Henrico County Division of Fire, and we've been talking about the internal and external effects of CRR on the fire service and the community.

Joe, I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with us.

Joe Powers: Hey, I appreciate it, Ed. Thank you for the opportunity.

Ed Comeau: And if you're not already subscribing to CRR Radio, well you should be. You can do it through your favorite podcast app, whether it's Apple podcast, Stitcher, Outcast or any other app. Just search for CRR Radio, hit that subscribe button, and you'll be getting CRR Radio automatically. Download it to your smartphone whenever we come out with a new episode, which is about every two weeks.



***Side Effects of CRR Part 2  
Conversation with Captain Joe Powers  
CRR Radio [www.StrategicFire.org/SideEffects1](http://www.StrategicFire.org/SideEffects1)***

CRR Radio is a production of the Vision 20/20 Project, and it's edited by Rich Palmer and produced by me, Ed Comeau. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time on CRR Radio.

Speaker 1: Thanks for joining us on CRR Radio from the Vision 20/20 Project. For more information on community risk reduction, please visit us at [www.strategicfire.org](http://www.strategicfire.org).