



Presentation Title: Fire Safe South Carolina - Statewide Support for Station-Based Community Risk Reduction Programming

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I. Formative Evaluation – Planning

South Carolina has historically ranked high in fire-related fatalities. Fire prevention and reduction of fire and life safety concerns have long been a priority of State Fire. Hard-working fire prevention practitioners, over the last two decades, laid the groundwork for the transition to and progress by CRR staff. In 2011, a CRR Team formed with three personnel. It has grown to a team of eight. Staff coordinate data analysis, curriculum coordination, and outreach. In 2012, the Community Loss Education and Response (CLEAR) Team formed to research fire-related deaths (presented at the 2018 Model Performance in CRR Symposium). Standardized data collected from each fatality continues to identify and prioritize strategic efforts. Barriers for the adoption of CRR statewide, and support for station-based programming, were identified amongst local and state entities. Barriers included: lack of unity in direction, resistance to influence/change, absence of dedicated personnel, strained volunteer fire services, shortages in financial and alarm resources, tense relationships, poor data practices, inconsistent public educational messages, time, and staff training.

II. Process Evaluation – Implementation

To address barriers, the “Fire Safe South Carolina” (FSSC) program was launched in 2017, with goals to reduce fire-related injuries, promote consistent messaging, increase data quality, and provide valuable resources. Its mission is “to unite fire service organizations to engage influential community stakeholders; together, we will support local fire departments to serve their citizens through strategic community risk reduction programs.” Its united partners include the SC Firefighters’ Association, Fire Chiefs’ Association, State Fire Marshals’ Association, and SC State Fire. The partnership meets quarterly to maintain direction.

The program was launched during summer state fire service conferences. Afterward, we scheduled and visited with the fire service and their engaged community partners, county-by-county, to review current fire prevention and CRR efforts, forge new relationships, and establish program focus. Core Four Messaging around Right Alarm – Right Location, Fire Drill Plans and Prep, Fire Sprinklers Save Lives, and See a Problem –Take Action was shared. During these Phase I county meetings, a statewide community risk assessment (CRA) was shared, along with county-specific information. Risk maps based on factors from death and response data assisted fire departments in determining the highest-risk areas in their counties. Our CRA did not include NFIRS data due to incomplete areas.

Currently, 43 of 46 counties have held the initial Phase I meeting. In 2019, Phase II of the program, fire departments received a survey to assess activities and set CRR goals. Seventy-five agencies out of 506 statewide (15 percent) responded and will be evaluated for recognition in summer 2020 (Phase III). A new survey will be issued yearly, responses collected, and evaluated for recognition. An “FSSC Community” sign will be issued to recognize station-based CRR activities. Two of our staff members are each responsible for 23 counties and serve as a representative for approximately 250 districts. Staff engage, support, and track the progress of fire districts as they become designated as a FSSC Community.

III. Impact Evaluation – Short-Term Results

There is an energy around CRR in our state. We see this in attendance at events and training. In FY 2019, we saw a 40 percent increase during Quarterly Fire and Life Safety Educator training. We continue to offer end-user and administrator training for NFIRS, along with Home Safety Visit training. In terms of data quality and frequency, our NFIRS invalid rates have decreased by half from 2016 to 2018. Reports entered have steadily increased annually by four percent. We held our first SC Fire and CRR Summit in 2019, with nearly 300 people present. A web presence continues to grow (www.firesafe.sc.gov), including social media (@FireSafeSC). Technology in the form of smoke, carbon, and deaf/hard of hearing alarms is a priority, with an average of 20,000 alarms installed annually (since 2014). The American Red Cross (ARC) of SC is a constant partner, as we install the same devices for uniform training and blitz operations. Resources, nationally, state, and locally are tracked in their system for recording of lives saved and in planning for replacements. Our agency is largely dependent on grant/donated alarm resources. In FY 19, the FSSC program distributed alarm resources to 132 fire departments (103% increase from the previous year). Nationally, ARC has documented 699 lives saved due to installs and education since 2014. Of those saved, 76 persons, or 11 percent, are from our state. Engaged partnerships by our unified fire service organizations have facilitated our progress in obtaining alarms, holding training opportunities, establishing referral protocols for citizens in need, and supporting our local fire service partners. Some relationships include Dept. of Education, SC Baptist Convention, Dept. of Health and Environmental Control, Vision 20/20, SCETV, Dept. of Disabilities and Special Needs, Children’s Trust of SC, Hearing Loss Association of America, Office on Aging, Sound Off with the Home Fire Safety Patrol, NFPA, Jeffrey Lee Williams Foundation, Dept. of Veterans’ Affairs, Columbia International University, Town/Gown Safety Community Service Project, Revenue and Fiscal Affairs, and The Pet Oxygen Kit Project.

IV. Outcome Evaluation – Long-Term Results

In 1989, State Fire reported 178 persons died due to fire in SC. Currently, there are 71 confirmed deaths for 2019, a 60 percent decrease in reported fatal fires during the past 30 years. Historically, we have observed reported deaths as a monitor of our collective efforts to address community risk. Several factors influence these numbers, including changing definitions and effective interventions. Improved relationships with the local fire service resulted in a 16% increase in reporting (85% of departments in 2019), a 50% decrease in invalid reports from 2016 – 2018 and a seven percent decrease from 2018 to 2019. With increased consistency, we have seen a 30 percent drop in confirmed deaths since the FSSC program started in 2017.

Recommendations for others:

Agency history provided us a context to get started. Define the problem and establish goals before action. Focus on all five E’s of CRR, not simply education. Bring CRR champions together to address barriers, build organizational support, and share ideas. Encourage state-to-state networking. Build equity with stakeholders.

Conclusions:

Often, we find ourselves staring at the following equation: Data + _____ = Action. Sometimes data is anecdotal and, too often, of poor quality. Regardless of the barrier, inhibiting action in reducing the risk or furthering support for statewide efforts, we have found partnerships often serve as a catalyst.