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Hi, my name is Ed Comeau from CRR Radio, and joining us on today's show are three experts from across the nation who are going to give us their perspective on what CRR is going to look like after COVID-19. Now I do want to mention that we did get together on Zoom for this, so the audio quality might not be there like it usually is, but I think you understand, as everybody does understand these days. So with that, let's get into the show.

Today on CRR Radio, it's Thursday, April 30th, and we're doing something a little bit different. We are going to have a panel discussion on the future of CRR, and we have three experts from across the nation joining, and I'd like to ask them to introduce themselves. How about we start with you, Josh?

Josh Fulbright: Josh Fulbright. I'm the Chief of Community Risk Reduction with the Office of State Fire Marshal in South Carolina.

Ed Comeau: Rich Palmer.

Rich Palmer: Rich Palmer, Assistant Chief of Fire Prevention at the Ohio Division of State Fire Marshal.

Ed Comeau: And Joe Powers.

Joe Powers: I am not with a State Fire Marshal. I am the Deputy Chief of Community Risk Reduction in the City of Charlottesville, Virginia.

Ed Comeau: Thanks for joining us. I think you're all going to be able to give us a different perspective on the topic today: The future of CRR. This pandemic has really turned everything upside-down in terms of how we are planning, preparing, responding, reacting to this new world that we're living in. Now that a lot of the departments, I think, have a good handle on that whole part of responding to it, I'd like to start looking a little bit down the road, both short term and long term,

as to where CRR is going to be going. Because we're going to have new limitations on us, but I think at the same time, we've rapidly learned a lot because of this in terms of how we're reaching out to people and how we're interacting with the community.

So really, the first question I'd like to pose to the panel is what permanent changes do you think will be happening because of COVID-19 in relation to how we're doing CRR? And Rich, I think I'd like to ask you to be the first one to weigh in on that, if you don't mind.

Rich Palmer:

Our challenges in Ohio right now are that we are very limited to any direct contact with our potential target audiences. One of the things that we are taking advantage of at this point is that we are truly compiling data. We're trying to look at every aspect that may contribute to risk as a result of this event, but also anything else that we've been missing. It's been really nice because we are getting good reporting back from the fire departments, but we're also encouraging them to participate in the National Fire Data Center's special study that should be in everybody's software application that asks about whether or not events are directly related to or at least adjacent to COVID. Would they have happened if we weren't in a COVID-related experience?

Some things obviously still do happen, but we need data and we need a lot of data to show just exactly where we need to turn in an event like this but also beyond. I think we're getting better at that, and I think everyone will get better at that. They now have to interpret what they want to do with it, and then how they show they've changed the impact of what's happening. So the future is changing, I think, because we're getting smarter.

Ed Comeau:

Josh, how about your perspective down there in South Carolina throughout the state and also nationally from when you're talking with other people, your peers across the country? What kind of permanent changes do you think is going to happen because of COVID-19?

Josh Fulbright:

Here in South Carolina and my discussions with others across the country, we're constantly talking about the impact of data in regards to COVID and our responses. I've found that fire departments are really evaluating their responses, trying to mitigate the impact or potential exposure to those in their department. Every response is being evaluated and whether there's a need for fire department personnel on the scene.

In addition, in permanent changes down the road, I think one of the things that we've been talking about are our home safety visits and going in and doing things proactively, also keeping in mind that we've got valuable partnerships such as the American Red Cross. We've already got a number of barriers that exist to get into homes, which were ahead of COVID, but how will the situation, the health crisis that we're in currently, how's that going to impact us long term? There's a lot of unknowns of how we will mitigate the impact to not only our citizens across the state, but our fire personnel.

Ed Comeau: Joe, in Virginia, what changes are you seeing that are going to become permanent when it comes to CRR and to doing CRR in your community?

Joe Powers: Well, I think COVID has provided us with an opportunity to expose some of the efficiencies that we didn't know that we had available to us. You look at the way that we communicate with each other now, over Zoom and Teams and WebEx and even FaceTime. It's interesting that in the city of Charlottesville, our plans reviewer is now doing FaceTime-related inspections to see some of those small inspections that something needed to be fixed or something needed to be placed. Instead of going back out and doing face-to-face interactions, he's able to do that with FaceTime, or there's a Google product as well. I think it's Google Duo that a lot of contractors are using.

I think we're going to come out of COVID in a much better light because here in the city of Charlottesville, and I think across the nation, many people are taking this pause as an opportunity to realign policy, take a look at all of the programs and the materials that we have published either online or in print, and get those back to where they should be. Because, unfortunately, some of that stuff is always on a back burner. We need to keep that up to date, and this is a perfect time to do it.

Lastly, I think, like Rich and Josh both said, taking a look at the data in a different way and looking for opportunities to be a little bit more efficient, we can really start to reduce the workload of our community risk reduction and our fire prevention models through community risk assessments. Because any time that we provide a community risk assessment to truly understand the risks that our community faces and we build programs truly around those risks, then we reduce the workload of our organization. And I think that's what COVID is allowing us to start to do, to realize where we should be working and maybe where we don't need to be working, but we just need to monitor in a different way.

Ed Comeau: I really agree with you, Joe, in that obviously COVID-19 is a terrible tragedy across the nation, but also it is a very unique opportunity to look at what we can do new and different. So what I'm really interested in is what are some of the creative solutions that everybody's been seeing pop up, how people are continuing to deliver CRR under the present circumstances that have some promise for the future?

Josh, down there in South Carolina, have you seen anything that's very creative and that we can use going forward?

Josh Fulbright: Definitely. We've had a lot of successful things turned out by our local fire service here. A number of them have been supporting our local department of education as well as their county departments of education, hosting station tours virtually, having reading with a firefighter events, and providing activities for the kids while they're out of school.

But also outside of that, our fire service has been supporting their local and our state emergency managers. We've been looking at ways to not only plan when we reach the peak of COVID and after, but also helping folks through testing operations. We've been looking into planning functions for re-entry into the workplace and helping developing safety measures using different PPE, so ways that our state team or state community risk reduction team has been supporting our state emergency management and our state fire marshal's office and getting back to work when this has all run its course.

Ed Comeau: Rich, how about you? What are you seeing in Ohio or beyond when it comes to creative solutions?

Rich Palmer: Well, I think maybe even across the globe. But as Josh said, working with other agencies, that effort is really stepping up. We're seeing that both here at our level and at the very low levels of neighborhoods and communities. Fire departments are stepping out and building partnerships, talking with people that perhaps they should have had a working relationship in the past and did not, and they're now engaging regularly.

Things as simple as the sheriff's office, the fire department, the EMA putting the child safety seat trailer on the road filled up with box lunches from the schools that they're delivering out to the community for the kids that need their lunches each day that don't typically have them at home, these partnerships are building advocacy-related issues that I think are going to continue far beyond this event. We've even identified other state agencies that have very similar goals and strategies that we didn't know existed and are now building some new programs and looking to the future with that.

Ed Comeau: In an earlier podcast conversation I had with Joe Powers, where you were talking about opening the city back up again and you're starting to really work across the city with other agencies within Charlottesville, you'd mentioned how you're realizing what new efficiencies can come out of this. I think you had referenced your social service agencies. They realize that they can't go knocking on the doors anymore, but they can sure hit a lot of people virtually and just maybe trading off a little bit of the quality versus quantity. Can you talk a little bit about that, Joe?

Joe Powers: Yeah, absolutely. Our department of social services and the department of human services are both groups of social workers that are working with the vulnerable populations within the city of Charlottesville, both for COVID through APS, adult protective services, and child protective services. The social workers were doing face-to-face visits around once a week with each of their clients. When COVID came around, we realized that that's probably not a good thing to do. We need to come up with other ways to do it.

So now, the social workers are connecting sometimes multiple times a day with the same client using FaceTime and Zoom, and they realize that some of the members of our older population that are vulnerable and at risk are actually

really good at the technology and have the devices in hand. Now that we're not doing face-to-face interactions as often, we're actually connecting more often with those folks that are most at need in the community.

Ed Comeau: That's certainly something that can translate into CRR as to how we're doing a lot of the things. One of the real downsides, or potential downsides, of what's going to be happening soon is the huge hit that the people are going to take on their budgets, both in this fiscal year and next fiscal year. Unfortunately, one of the things that oftentimes goes away is the fire prevention or the CRR bureau. That's the first one that may be cut, which is going to be absolutely terrible obviously. But on a positive side of that, do you guys think that this is going to help CRR become more integrated into operations because so many departments are doing CRR, and they'll realize the value of continuing to do it and integrating it into daily operations of the fire department? How about we start with you, Rich?

Rich Palmer: Well, that's a very timely question, Ed. As I talked with you earlier today, I was on an interview panel this morning with one of our fire departments that is hiring a community risk reduction coordinator. This person's going to have various hats to wear. But to me, it's very intriguing that at a time when others are looking at downsizing or perhaps eliminating resources that may be connected to or related to prevention, this agency is looking at the five E's very closely, putting that under a microscope and saying we really need somebody who has a firm grasp on both community risk assessment but also how to gather the data, laser focus their efforts toward the highest risks and start eliminating those one by one.

The interview panel was very enlightening. The questions being asked were very poignant and very appropriate to the time that we're in, but they were also being answered by some very intelligent people that seemed to have a firm grasp. That tells me the culture is shifting, when both the applicants and the agencies are on the same page.

Ed Comeau: Also, from the state perspective, Josh, what do you think? We're going to unfortunately have these layoffs, but do you think it's going to help make CRR become even more integrated into operations?

Josh Fulbright: Like Rich said, I think that's definitely something that's on people's minds. And like situations we've dealt with in the past, I think this is definitely an opportunity to take CRR to the forefront of our activities within the department, within operations. We routinely face various environmental hazards, whether they be natural or manmade, and this is another opportunity where being proactive to those things that we can anticipate and reactive to emerging risk, not just sitting on our laurels and waiting for the next thing to occur, where you get out front and make sure that we are valued members as risk reduction practitioners.

I spoke to a lot of folks across my state and others who are tied to their offices right now regardless of their function. So I think it's a great opportunity for those folks to get out there and get involved and plug in with those partners who are working on the front lines and addressing these situations.

Ed Comeau: And Joe, you're probably one of those people who will be in the hot seat. As a deputy chief in charge of CRR in Charlottesville, you may have to face those harder decisions. What do you see?

Joe Powers: Yeah, absolutely. I think we're all going to be in the same seat, but especially the cities and the counties that have these inspectors, and the investigators, and the public educators. What we need to do is allow community risk reduction to tell the story of the community and tell the story of the fire department. Because most people see the fire department as shiny lights and fire trucks driving up and down the road going to disasters, and we don't tell our story very well about the good things we do in the community. Most of our annual reports show burned houses and streams of water flowing into smoking windows. But I think that this is a good opportunity to change the mindset of our community to show the investment for which we have made into the community and for which the community has made in us.

We have to be good storytellers about what we do, and we can use the outcomes from community risk reduction. Community risk reduction is not just inspectors and public educators. Community risk reduction touches every part of the fire service, all through operations and especially within education and public engagement. There's good opportunities. We need to seize them, and we need to change the way that our community views us so we're not on the chopping block for budget cuts.

Ed Comeau: And that actually is a perfect segue, Joe, into my next question here that I'm going to throw to Rich and Josh is just that. So often, so many people look at fire-related topics for CRR, and is this going to cause departments to widen their perception that CRR is just not another phrase for fire prevention, that there are other risks out there in the community. Of course, our one today is COVID, but there are other risks out in the community far beyond those that are fire related. Josh?

Josh Fulbright: I think it definitely will have us to broaden our perspectives. It already is. We're looking to see how we can help our communities through this situation, whether it be people who are restrained to their home while trying to celebrate birthdays. We've got fire trucks that are going through neighborhoods building good will, but making sure that they're staying out in the forefront and involved and engaged in our communities. We've got fire departments who are helping our seniors, our Class of 2020, celebrate graduations.

We're going to come out of this safer and more efficient. There's a lot of things that we're seeing that firefighters and fire service are helping out with... testing facilities. I mean, I've heard firefighters and their wives and volunteers using

things they have at home like 3D printers and old Barrel of Monkeys games to help medical providers get masks, the weight-bearing masks, off their ears to make their jobs more easier as they're functioning.

So I think it's all about just figuring out how we as the fire service can plug in during this situation. As far as fire prevention and CRR, I see things getting more and more away from it being the lone job of one person in the department. It's really becoming whole community focused. We talk about integrating community risk management. So I think now, more than ever, that becomes even more important that we engage all the community partners in our respective jurisdictions.

Ed Comeau:

Rich?

Rich Palmer:

Josh is on the money with this. It is so much more than that one person that you assign that particular issue or duty to. I've looked at this entire integrated management focus from a new light in the last couple of years because I've seen so many fire chiefs that are just now having the light bulb turn on and realizing what they were doing before was taking one component of their services and saying, well, if I solve that problem, then everything else will go away. You can't just solve a problem trying to reduce your response times, or you can't just solve a problem by hiring more medics, or you can't just solve a problem because you put on a civilian safety educator or assigned a line officer to a safety education job. You have to have these people talking together, and networking, and sharing data, and sharing experience, and putting things together with a very defined purpose.

When you start integrating those together and networking with other agencies that have like-minded attitudes, you start realizing it's not just a fire safety problem, or it's not just an EMS response problem. It is a risk problem, which means behavior, which means people and conditions and elements around them. And all of those things can't just be shot at with a shotgun approach. You really have to define what you're doing.

So I think our fire service is becoming smarter because we've learned how to do everything we do, but we've combined it into one function or one ability to see results.

Ed Comeau:

Well, we've been talking with three national experts really, and I'm sure they're very humble and won't agree with me, but these are three people I've worked with over the years that are really very knowledgeable when it comes to CRR, and I really appreciate your perspective on it. We've been talking with Josh Fulbright, who's a section chief in charge of CRR for the Office of State Fire Marshal of South Carolina; Deputy Chief, Joe Powers, from Charlottesville Fire Department down there in Virginia; and Assistant Chief, Rich Palmer, with the Ohio State Fire Marshal's Office. I really appreciate all of you taking the time and talking with us today on CRR Radio.



Josh Fulbright: Thanks, Ed.

Rich Palmer: Thanks so much, Ed.

Joe Powers: Thank you.

Ed Comeau: You have been listening to a special edition of CRR Radio focusing on what departments across the country are doing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I also want to remind you of the coronavirus shared resources library that contains a wealth of information relating to policies and procedures that you might find helpful. Or if you have something you want to contribute, you can do it all at strategicfire.org/coronavirus.

CRR Radio is a production of Vision 20/20, and it's produced by me, Ed Comeau, and edited by Rich Palmer. Be sure to subscribe and follow us on Twitter and Facebook at Strategic Fire. Thank you for listening.