FROM FIREFIGHTER TO PREVENTION EXPERT

3 Effective Ways to Improve Your Fire Prevention Program

By Fire Safety Education
Introduction

You’ve heard of community crisis management. Most likely, you’ve also memorized to heart the five e’s of fire prevention.

These are important topics for every fire prevention program. However, this material and research already exists. You can find all sorts of information on creating effective fire prevention programs -- all it takes is a google search.

This whitepaper will explore the ways in which you can improve your fire prevention program. First, let’s start with a very important and continuous step in a fire prevention program -- evaluation.

Evaluate, Evaluate, Evaluate!

Thomasville Fire Rescue (TFR), serving the largest city in Thomas County, Georgia, has experienced a substantial decrease in the number of fire related calls within their district from 2014-2017 (Emergency Reporting). How did they do it? With an effective community risk assessment.

A community risk assessment is a process that helps fire departments discover how to maximize resources effectively. They also take a lot of time and effort (and personnel) to complete. However, while it is important to complete the assessment, it is also important to monitor, evaluate and modify the assessment. Otherwise, how will you know if the assessment is working?
“Research seeks to prove, evaluation seeks to improve.”

Firehouse

According to Vision 20/20, there are four stages of evaluation before, during and after a community assessment -- formative, process, impact, and outcome.

How the Planning Process Connects to Evaluation

The first stage of evaluation, the formative stage, revisits the very first steps in an assessment -- identification of problems, needs, risk assessment and/or research. Are the fire trends in your community the same as when you first completed your risk assessment? Has the target population of your assessment changed?

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The **second** stage of evaluation is the process stage -- implementation, workload, efficiency, and program satisfaction. Your prevention program should have a coalition or agency in place to carry out the prevention activities. Does each individual in the coalition or agency carry their own weight? Are there defined goals and objectives each member should complete in a certain time frame? Just as the National Fire Protection Association states, sometimes a chart, such as an action plan, can help plan the implementation stage and monitor progress.

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The **third** stage of evaluation is the impact stage -- short-term results. This stage measures knowledge gain, and risk-reduction behaviors. This is where the “Five E’s” of prevention takes place (education, engineering, enforcement, economic incentives and emergency response). Each “e” is a type of intervention strategy that prevent incidents -- such as youth fire setting or home fires -- from occurring. Basically, they are types of risk reduction. For example, flyers and brochures fall into education and smoke alarms and fire sprinklers fall into engineering.

In terms of evaluation, it depends on which of the five e's your prevention program utilizes. There are several ways in which you can evaluate the impact of a program, such as surveys, questionnaires, direct observation, focus groups, etc. Whichever method you choose, you need to tweak your program based on its results. For example, your program can use education as an intervention method and use a survey to measure its impact. Based on the survey’s results, your prevention program needs to be tweaked. For example, if the survey does not show a change in behaviors, perhaps instead of focusing on education, your program should focus on enforcement.

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The **fourth** and final stage of evaluation is the outcome stage -- long-term results. The outcome stage measures the changes or reductions in loss data for deaths, injuries, property loss, or responses. “While an impact evaluation looks for changes, the outcome evaluation looks for reduction resulting from those changes” (Vision 20/20). This stage analyzes statistics over a couple of years. For example, let’s say your fire prevention plan included the education intervention strategy for home fire safety. Your department would want to look at the data on home fires that have occurred by your target audience from before your prevention plan took affect and at the time of your evaluation. Trend analysis, benchmarking and performance analysis are ways to compare and evaluate data.

![Trending Chart Example](image.png)

*Year CRR program began

**“Personnel” Problems**

Planning a fire prevention program is one thing -- implementation is another. There are two types of personnel problems that can arise during a fire prevention program.

First, issues with stakeholders -- members or staff of the program -- can occur. These are individuals that carry out the program and
make up the community planning team or coalition. In terms of fire, stakeholders can include: firefighters, federal and nonprofit agencies and organizations, member(s) of the target audience, influencers, media, etc.

It takes a village to run a fire prevention plan. The more stakeholders in your program, the more problems can arise. Lack of leadership, lack of defined goals, lack of responsibilities and time restraints are just a few of the problems that can arise. How can your program avoid these problems? Preparation and communication from the very beginning. As Vision 20/20 states, the fire prevention program should clearly describe in detail what each stakeholder will do, how they will do it, and who will do it. To have a successful program, adequate resources should be allocated, which include staff, funding, time and community partners. There should also be a level of training and coaching and management for all the stakeholders involved.

The second type of personnel problems that can arise during a fire prevention program are the participants of the program. The target audience your program focuses on. These are the individuals that are on the receiving end of prevention activities such as presentations, meetings, focus groups, etc.

The main issue fire prevention programs can face when dealing with program participants are the competing demands of time and energy. For example, let’s say one of your coalition members is having a
fire prevention presentation. What makes them want to attend the presentation? They need to be excited about fire safety.

“Fire department life safety educators must be “cheerleaders, promoters and recruiters all in one.”

Firehouse

Earlier, I briefly discussed the “Five E’s” of prevention (education, engineering, enforcement, economic incentives and emergency response). Brent Faulkner, a man with 22 years of experience in the fire service, believes there should be a sixth e: empowerment. The success of a fire prevention program has to do a lot with positive public support (Vision 20/20). Your coalition team members must market the program to the members in the community in a way to make them have interest. Then, the members will have enough interest, or empowerment, to continue being a part of the prevention program. Social media, local media, direct mail and meetings are several methods in which you can market the program to your community (National Fire Protection Association).

Utilizing Prevention Material

Funding for fire prevention is hard to come by. Most fire prevention funding comes from grants, community partners, and the majority from the fire department itself. Funds are needed for materials, events, paying personnel and purchasing equipment such as smoke alarms (National Fire Protection Association). This means your program needs to be smart about how to use funds. Here are a few ways on how to effectively purchase prevention material.
First, think about your target audience. The materials you use should reflect the type of message you want to deliver. If you are targeting fire prevention for the elderly, you would want to purchase fire safety outreach materials for older adults. Second, pair prevention material with prevention activities. What are prevention activities? These are activities that reduce risk factors and encourage positive behavior or problem your community is trying to address. The combination of both positive (prevention activities) and negative (prevention material) increases the likelihood of long-term change (the overall goal of prevention programs). Third, test your materials! Before you distribute prevention materials on a large scale, distribute them on a smaller scale. Makes sense, right? Afterwards, you can get feedback from the target audience and make changes going forward.

Conclusion

In the end, don’t be afraid to monitor, evaluate and modify your program. In regards to the personnel that carry out the prevention program activities, detailed lists and descriptions can go a long way. Furthermore, program personnel need to create enough interest to excite their community into being a part of the prevention program. Finally, use your funds wisely with prevention material. Match your material to your target audience, use them with prevention activities and test them.

The following page acts as both a works cited and additional resources. I strongly encourage taking a look at them in your own free time for more tips and tricks on fire prevention programs!
Works Cited


About Fire Safety Education

Our company produces the very best in fire education materials for people of all ages. We research, design and produce our public education materials with the goal of making our customer’s jobs easier and more effective.

At Fire Safety Education, we believe:

• In the power of fire safety and prevention education. Our materials are designed to educate and inspire people of all ages.

• That great customers deserve great customer service. Our friendly fire prevention experts are ready to assist you with all your public education needs.

• In providing the best quality products at the best prices. If you find a similar product for a lower price - we’ll match it!