CHIEF CONCERNS: COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION

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Good fire chiefs understand the importance of assessing risk in their communities. But the most progressive chiefs are actively working to reduce that risk by implementing Community Risk Reduction programs. They are shifting their stance on risk from reactive to proactive—all in the name of better service to their communities.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION?

The National Fire Protection Association defines Community Risk Reduction (CRR) as "programs, actions and services used by a community which prevent or mitigate the loss of life, property, and resources associated with life safety, fire, and other disasters within a community."

A more direct definition would be the identification and prioritization of specific risks to a community, followed by a coordinated application of resources to minimize the probability of those events from happening, or reduce the impact of those events.

It's about being prepared—and knowing what to prepare for.

OLD PRINCIPLES: NEW APPROACH

CRR programs are about more than just educating on the importance of sprinklers, or providing free car seat inspections. They require a commitment to doing a comprehensive 360-degree risk assessment of your community and putting response and mitigation plans in place for each identified risk.

Though not an entirely new concept—CRR programs have been successfully launched in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada—such programs are just now starting to gain momentum in the United States.

Risk reduction programs provide equal value to departments of all sizes and locales—from the largest urban departments, to small rural and volunteer departments—and especially to agencies that face financial challenges and must make critical decisions about resource allocation.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT A SUCCESSFUL CRR PROGRAM IN YOUR COMMUNITY

While it may sound simple, implementing a strong CRR program takes time, resources, strategic thinking and collaboration. You can't just say, "Oh, that's something we'll have our safety prevention guy handle." A true community risk reduction program is much bigger than one or two people. It's a department-wide initiative.

Below are the steps needed to successfully implement a risk reduction program in your community. These steps are outlined in further detail in *Community Risk Reduction Planning: A Guide for Developing a Community Risk Reduction Plan,* a report developed by the Vision 20/20 Project.

Identify risks: Take a look at your incident data and couple that with what you know about your community (geography, demographics, etc.) to get an accurate picture of the potential risks in your community. Work with your community partners, including fellow public safety departments, other government agencies and private organizations, and leverage their information and expertise to be better prepared.

Prioritize risks: Once you've developed your risk assessment, you need to prioritize the risks considering both probability of occurrence as well as high impact/low frequency risks. Then ensure you have an appropriate response plan for each identified risk.

Develop strategies and tactics to mitigate risk: As you develop your mitigation strategy for each of your identified risks, use the "Five E's" as tools to help ensure the appropriate response. The 5 E's are:

- Emergency Response: Examine how to best deploy and structure a response to the different risks. Every department—and community—is different.
- Engineered Response: Engineered responses are solutions you can put in place to mitigate risks before they happen. Examples include: fire sprinklers, smoke alarms, heat-regulating technologies, etc. Such solutions can help reduce the likelihood of an event or reduce its impact.
- Enforcement Response: Introducing (or reinforcing) laws and regulations can significantly reduce risk in a community.
- Education Response: Often the most cost-effective solution is education. Take the time to educate the community and work to change behavior related to high-risk activities.
- Economic Incentive Response: Consider working with local government to implement monetary rewards, such as a tax benefits, for participation in risk reduction activities.

Prepare the CRR plan: The rubber meets the road when you begin to implement your plan. Make sure your strategy is well communicated to the members of your department, as well as external stakeholders.

Implement the CRR plan: Like the plan itself, the implementation of your CRR strategy will be unique. It's your responsibility to tailor the plan to your community.

Monitor, Evaluate and Modify Plan: Once the plan is in place, continue to evaluate and modify it as necessary.

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TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

You'll notice the plan is never done. You are constantly reviewing risks, evaluating response plans and mitigation strategies and pulling in new resources to help strengthen the plan.

6 Steps of the CRR Approach

06 Monitor, Evaluate and Modify Plan

01 Identify Risks

02 Prioritize Risks

03 Develop Strategies & Tactics to Mitigate Risks

04 Prepare the CRR Plan

05 Implement the CRR Plan

CASE STUDIES

Departments across the country are implementing CRR programs in their communities, but some notable examples include:

Madison Fire Department, Wisconsin
Use of on-duty and off-duty firefighters and fire prevention personnel to reach high-risk areas; strong examples of community relationships by station area.

Philadelphia Fire Department, Pennsylvania
A one-month effort to conduct 7,000 home visits with the use of a private contractor to help identify high-risk homes.

Seattle Fire Department, Washington
Collaboration with members of the local North African immigrant community who become trained as local fire safety advocates.

Spring Lake Park, Blaine, Mounds View Fire Department, Minnesota
A mostly volunteer fire department using a point system to incentivize staff.

Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue, Oregon: Effort to get the "right resource with the right staffing delivered to the right call at the right time."

While each of these agencies have produced CRR success stories, the experiences of the Philadelphia Fire Department and the Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue stand out.

Philadelphia Fire committed early on to an extensive smoke detector distribution and installation program with significant statistical results. The most dramatic outcome is contained in a compelling YouTube video, *"Monique's Story."*

The organization-wide commitment to data-driven risk reduction by TVF&R has produced some of the most impressive statistical outcomes, which are worthy of an in-depth exploration by interested EMS & fire officials.

WHERE DO I START?

Implementing a strong CRR program in your community is a process—step one is simply gaining a better understanding of the concept. Several great resources are available online, including:

• Vision 20/20: *Strategicfire.org* is a resource-rich website with information about CRR.
• NFPA: The NFPA published a white paper in 2016, *Community Risk Reduction: Doing More with More.*

In addition, the US Fire Administration's *National Fire Academy* offers courses on CRR.

Your community's expectations of your department continue to evolve, as do the challenges you face in ensuring that your department can provide adequate, cost-effective services to the community.

Developing and implementing a Community Risk Reduction program will:

• Help your department rise to challenges.
• Help use limited resources to most effectively prevent, respond to and mitigate emergencies in the community.
• Help the fire chief sleep well!

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