

Sample Five Step Plans in Urban Fire Departments

Five Step Planning Process, October 2011 National Fire Protection Association

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Step 1: Conduct a Community Analysis

Hamilton, Ontario, has a population of just more than 500,000 in both rural and urban settings. It is divided into 15 wards each of which differs significantly in terms of socio-economic status, ethnic backgrounds and housing stock. The city is located in southern Ontario on the western end of the Niagara Peninsula and wraps around the western end of Lake Ontario. Nearly one quarter of Hamilton residents are immigrants and less than 2 percent of the population is non-English or French speaking. Sales, trade and business are the leading occupations for residents. The leading economic activity is manufacturing with more than half of the steel used in Canada produced in Hamilton.

The average age of residents is 39.6 years with 17.8 percent of the population age 14 years and under and 14.9 percent age 65 or older. Hamilton is home to several colleges and one university. The Hamilton Fire Services analyzed fires across the city. This analysis involved looking at structure fires across the entire city and then breaking down that statistical information to each of the different wards. Wards 2 and 3 consistently had the highest number of structure fires, accounting for 41 percent of all the residential structure fires across the city. In addition, compliance with smoke alarm legislation is just less than 40 percent. The number one cause of fires within these two wards is unattended cooking and careless smoking, both of which are preventable.

The project will focus on the importance of working smoke alarms as the primary effort, as well as outreach on other fire safety issues, such as careless cooking and smoking. The fires in these wards affect many residents because of the large number of multi-unit dwellings and economic conditions, a large number of these residents do not have insurance to assist them after a fire. Several children in Hamilton have died in recent fires as the direct result of preventable fires caused by others.

Step 2: Develop Community Partnerships

Having the support of the local elected officials in Hamilton was important. Working with various ward councilors, fire officials held public meetings in various wards of the city. They involved local media to help advertise the meetings. At these public meetings, the fire department provided residents and elected officials with an overview of the existing public education programs and a look at how the department reaches out to the public with safety information. Residents had the opportunity to discuss their ideas on how the city can effectively reduce the number of house fires and better educate the public. An important aspect of these meetings was determining how to better deliver fire and life safety education messages to the public.

Based on information gathered at the public meetings and additional focus groups meetings, the fire department recognized the importance of partnering with other community organizations to assist in delivering messages and programs. They created a list of community partners with Wards 2 and 3 that included schools, churches, faith groups, business partners, community hubs/centers, public libraries, property owners and management companies, social service agencies including the local health department, the Children's Aid Society and other community service and advocacy groups.

Step 3: Create a Strategy to Solve the Problem

The fire department met with several community partners, including faith groups, schools, recreation centers, libraries, community hubs, business groups and residents to discuss the fire problem within Wards 2 and 3. The Children's Aid Society, a city-wide agency, has committed to supporting the fire safety outreach efforts in Wards 2 and 3. The department identified a fire safe neighborhood project as the strategy to impact the fire problem in these wards. The project would focus on working smoke alarms and home fire safety inspections. The first step in the project was to get city council approval, assign fire department staff to the project and target neighborhoods within the wards.

Step 4: Implement the Strategy in the Community

With the implementation of various education programs, one initiative includes a partnership with the local Children's Aid Society. They have embarked on a program that has their workers conducting inspections of client's homes and incorporating a fire safety component that includes checking smoke alarms. A community fire prevention desk has been established in the local library in Ward 3. Additional fire safety programs and initiatives have been implemented with the schools in both wards, including a fire safety component in the cooking classes in the area high school. Fire Prevention staff now sit in on community hub group meetings and participate in planning community events, which include a fire safety education component. The local fire station that serves Wards 2 and 3 housed a summer camp program teaching children fire safety. These fire safety initiatives with children include a component in which they would bring home the fire safety information learned and conduct fire safety checks in their own homes with their parents. Also, the department held fire safety presentations throughout the wards with many local groups.

Step 5: Evaluate the Results

Evaluation of this public education program includes a close examination of statistical information regarding fires within the wards. The number of public contacts, inspections, and smoke alarm inspections are also being tracked. Ongoing meetings with the various community partners assist in the evaluation effort. Based on the results of the evaluation, amendments or changes to the project will be made to better get the fire and life safety messages out to residents.