

Neighborhood Smoke Detector Program

Program Description:

Since 1997, the Neighborhood Smoke Alarm Check has been an aggressive, on-going community service and awareness program that assures there is a working smoke alarm in each home of Bedford. Firefighters offer to check smoke alarms each time they go into a home for any reason and at appropriate times after EMS and fire incidents. In addition, firefighters assisted by members of our Citizen Fire Academy Alumni Association (CFAAA) canvas pre-designated neighborhoods several times each year. We go into any home where we are welcome, **at no charge**, to:

- Check smoke alarms for proper location and application
- Provide maintenance and test the operation of each smoke alarm
- Replace out-of-date and non-working smoke alarms or add new smoke alarms
- Test and change batteries
- Educate the occupants providing information concerning the importance of a working smoke alarm.

Reason for the implementation of the program:

"There is no honor in fighting a fire that could have been prevented." - Chief James Tindell

After reviewing the existing smoke alarm program, it was determined the operation lacked uniformity, structure, and was practically non-existent.

Outcomes of the program to the Department

A total overhaul was implemented beginning with department wide brainstorming sessions that identified the problems and concerns. This department wide effort gave direction and purpose in developing a successful program. All members of the department had the opportunity for input and understood the goal of the new program.

A Standard Operating Procedure was developed and implemented that included a purpose statement, training guidelines, and installation procedures.

A smoke alarm "kit" carrying smoke alarms, mounting hardware, extra batteries, a can of test smoke and compressed air, and the necessary tools to get the job done was placed on each fire engine and ambulance.

Department members and our CFAAA worked together circulating printed information about the program and promoting awareness of how working smoke alarms save lives.

Recent fire history was used to determine target neighborhoods. Door hangers with the message "Working Smoke Detectors Save Lives", vital fire safety information, and information about checking batteries and smoke alarms – FREE – on one side and the date firefighters would return on the other, were distributed in these target neighborhoods. They later returned and canvassed the same neighborhoods, knocking on doors, and checking smoke alarms.

Outcomes of the program to the Community

The people that live in these neighborhoods allow their firefighters, and members of the CFAAA to enter their home and check their smoke alarms. Firefighters and Medics give show-and-tell programs of their vehicles to neighbors and kids. They also pass out badge stickers. Firefighters have explained that one of their neighbors recently lost their home to fire and how it is everyone's responsibility to practice fire safety: Partners in Fire Prevention. Another expression that is used by the firefighters " Our family helping your family".

Many homes do not have a smoke alarm or the alarms are over ten years old or damaged. The firefighters install a new working smoke alarm. Many of the smoke alarms found do not work because they are damaged or the batteries are missing. The firefighters replace the damaged smoke alarm with a new working smoke alarm or replace the battery.

The outcomes of the Neighborhood Smoke Alarm Check program are many:

- The people of the community meet face-to-face, maybe for the first time during a non-emergency event, with their firefighters and became partners in fire prevention and life safety
- Many homes now have working smoke alarms, some for the very first time
- The people of the community know their firefighters care and stand ready to help their family, whenever the need arises
- Conducted several times throughout the year in whole neighborhoods

In addition, after each fire or EMS incident, fire department members check smoke alarms in Bedford homes, if appropriate.

The program is on-going with specific neighborhoods targeted and visited "en-masse". Additionally, as previously stated, the smoke detectors are inspected in each home to which we respond each day, when possible.

The only reason the Bedford Fire Department exists is to serve the people of Bedford. The members of the Fire Department are dedicated to educating citizens about fire and life safety and to assisting them as much as possible in being safer (James Tindell, Fire Chief).