

Get Alarmed and Get Going: Increasing Community Capacity for Fire Safety

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Case study

- Mobilizing the community to make real and lasting changes
- Making the most of a little money and a lot of community buy-in



Problem

East Cleveland, Ohio, has all of the factors associated with elevated residential fire risk:

- High population density
- Low income
- High minority residency
- High poverty rates
- Older housing stock



East Cleveland

- 27,217 people in 2 square miles (all urban)
- 94.6% African American
- Median household income of \$20,542
- Only 8.5% of population has a college degree
- > 1 in 4 families below poverty line
- Renter-occupancy rate (64.5%) *twice* as high as county average



East Cleveland Problem ID

- 57 fires in 12-month period
 - 96.5% residential
- East Cleveland's housing stock is largely comprised of wood-frame homes, most \geq 75 years
- Common causes of fires include faulty/deteriorating electrical wiring and the inappropriate use of space heaters
- Additional risks occur during the holiday season with the use of candles and holiday lighting displays



East Cleveland Problem ID

- For the 12-month period from 09/01/02 through 08/31/03, fourteen civilian fire injuries were reported in East Cleveland.
- Of those, 57% (8) were among children under age 18.
 - Six children were treated for smoke inhalation, and two were treated for burns (one for 2nd and 3rd degree burns.)
- On a per capita basis, this equaled approximately one fire-related injury for every 2,000 residents during the 12-month period



Impetus for Change

- Death of 6-year-old boy in residential fire in 2004 created a teachable moment and mobilized community to act



Advocacy

- Worked with East Cleveland City Council to craft a smoke detector ordinance
- Terran Justin Chappell Smoke Alarm Law requires all East Cleveland residences to have smoke alarms
- Passed on the condition that smoke detectors be made available to residents free of charge



Dilemma

- Detectors purchased by Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital with small fire safety grant
- How do we get them out into the community?
- How do we ensure that the alarms we give out actually get installed?



Theoretical grounding

What's more likely to work?

Members of
my community
work together
to solve a
problem

Or

Outsiders
come into my
community, tell
us what to do,
and leave



Theoretical grounding

- Giving anyone who wants one a free smoke detector is a waste of resources
- A smoke detector sitting at the bottom of a closet cannot save any lives



Goal

- Build on the momentum for community-wide change in the wake of Terran's death
- Provide free installation of free smoke detectors
- Involve people the community trusts
- Long term goals (getting alarms installed in every home) trump short term goals (distributing store of alarms as quickly as possible)



Plan of Action

- Launch a promotional campaign targeted at residents of East Cleveland to promote fire safety and the availability of free smoke alarms under this program.
- Partner with local fire academy to provide education and installation services
- Collaborate with East Cleveland Public Schools and Public Library system to get the word out to residents and schedule installs
- Get local businesses on board to spread the word



Project Collaborators

- Shaw High School Fire Cadet Academy
- East Cleveland City Council
- East Cleveland Public Library
- East Cleveland Municipal School District
- The East Cleveland Fire Department
- The East Cleveland Police Department
- University Hospitals Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital
- The American Red Cross, Greater Cleveland Chapter
- Greater Cleveland Safe Kids Coalition
- National Safe Kids (funding agency)



Shaw High Fire Cadets

- Lavalle Dorsey, director of the Shaw High Fire Cadet program, took on this project
- Instills pride in cadets – giving back to community
- Conduct fire education in elementary schools



Installations

- Cadets collect forms and make calls to schedule
- Cadets go out in teams to install smoke detectors in residences
- Provide walk-through with residents to talk about fire dangers, check existing alarms, and install new alarms



Partners in Action

- 19 Action News did a feature story on the project and interviewed Chappell family
- Libraries and schools distributed registration forms
- Cleveland *Plain Dealer* also helped get word out about registration forms
- Radio One joined coalition and agreed to advertise the campaign on radio and website (WZAK 93.1 FM)



Results since 2005 program launch

- > 500 smoke alarms installed by cadets
- > 200 smoke alarms installed by ECFD
- > 100 batteries replaced by cadets in homes with existing alarms
- > 25,000 brochures distributed at community events
- Smokey's Safe House games distributed to elementary schools



Program strengths

- Leveraging community concerns and community strengths
- Cultivating local ownership of the problem and the solution
- Creating a safer community better able to manage its own programs
- Emphasizing process over pace

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