Publication of a research report – Understanding people’s attitudes towards fire risk

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Addressed to:
Please forward to:
The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Chief Executive of the County Council
The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue Authority
The Commissioner of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
The Chief Fire Officer

Summary
This circular announces a research report which investigates people’s attitudes towards fire risk. The research provides an insight into the attitudes of groups considered to be vulnerable and/or ‘hard to reach’ and explores the role of community safety advocates and their impact on attitudes towards fire risk.

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1.0 **Background**

1.1 Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) and Communities and Local Government conduct a wide range of fire safety promotional work aimed at changing people’s attitudes towards fire safety and encouraging the adoption of various fire safety precautions.

1.2 Previous research has shown that a minority of people are most at risk from fire and these account for the majority of deaths. However, research on the attitudes of these groups to fire risk is limited.

1.3 This report provides an insight into the attitudes to fire risk of groups considered vulnerable and/or ‘hard to reach’. In addition, it explores the role of the community safety advocate and their impact on attitudes.

1.4 The research was qualitative in nature; focus groups and qualitative interviews were utilised as part of the research.

2.0 **Findings**

2.1 The main findings of the research are mostly applicable to Community Fire Safety (CFS) teams in fire and rescue services.

2.2 The results from the research suggest rather than categorising people by groups such as ‘age’ and ‘ethnicity’, people may be best segmented (for the purposes of targeting fire safety advice) according to:

- Lifestyle / life stage
- Household type (e.g. family vs. single)
- Vulnerability
- Attitudinal characteristics (e.g. concerned vs. unconcerned)

2.3 Advocates were used to access some of the hard to reach groups. It is thought that they help break down barriers and facilitate inclusion.

2.4 Advocates were often drawn from the community they serve and were paid, non-uniformed members of staff who possessed the necessary skills / experience e.g. they spoke another language, or had worked with the group before or were members of the group.

2.5 The research found that:

- The expressed level of concern about fire risk may not always be matched by the proportionate level of fire safety precautions
- The level of precautions reported by participants varied and was, in some cases, limited
- It was the view of the participants that experiencing a fire or hearing of one would prompt them to seek advice
- Respondents who participated in the research felt that they needed to be prompted on the additional fire safety precautions they could take
- The focus groups identified the need for further national and local fire safety promotion
• However, many participants who took part in the research thought that they took a reasonable level of precautions and this may have contributed to a lack of action in relation to seeking out advice.

3.0 Conclusions / Recommendations

3.1 The focus groups revealed that participants considered elements of current CFS work are useful, particularly:
• Adverts showing the causes of fire and encouraging the checking of smoke alarms
• Home Fire Risk Checks (HFRCs) and other face-to-face work
• ‘Hot Strikes’ to alert people to fires in their local area and offer HFRCs

3.2 The researchers put forward the following recommendations for CFS:
• The message and associated image needs to be tailored to the target audience – they should be able to identify with the characters/advocate and the behaviour
• The suggested fire safety precautions should be practical
• The locations of ‘messages’ should reflect the target groups lifestyle – radio for the visually impaired, adverts during children’s TV for families, etc.
• Friends and family of vulnerable groups could encourage adoption of fire safety precautions
• CFS messages could include ‘coping strategies’ to reduce the risk posed by risky behaviour, e.g. suggesting people smoke outside, do not cook whilst under the influence of alcohol, etc.
• The sense of fire should be conveyed using visual and auditory material
• Advice/adverts should empower people by showing them how they can practically prevent and respond to fires

3.3 The researchers put forward the following recommendations for advocates:
• they could be more effective if they focussed on those most at risk and tailored the content of their talks to the individual needs of their audiences
• FRSs should collect data on advocate activities, such as amount of time spent on advocate work, number of advocates, date first involved, number of HFRCs secured by advocate referrals, in order to assess their level of impact in the area of CFS

3.4 This work reaffirms the use of targeted fire safety messages, such as the Fire Kills Campaign and has already been useful to inform the work of the campaign.

3.5 The full report can now be found at http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fireriskattitudes.

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