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Identification

The Public Is the Fire Department's Customers

In order to develop a successful program you must determine who are your customers and what are their needs. Your goal is then to determine the best way to fulfill those needs. Now it would seem that for public fire education these questions should be easy to answer. Public fire education is important and we (the fire service) are the experts who can provide that education. This would imply that all you have to do is to show up at the schools and preach fire safety and you have met the needs of the customer. However this is not the case. There is increased competition these days for time and money for education. In order for your fire department to remain competitive in this market you must redefine how you will deliver your education program. You must answer the basic questions "what does the customer need and how can we meet those needs in the most productive manner possible?" If you are successful in answering those questions you will have designed a successful program. The goal might be to increase the safety of the community by reducing the numbers of fire deaths and injuries, reducing the number of fire responses to homes without working smoke alarms, or increasing the number of families greeting first responders at their meeting place. These changes in behavior in the community, achieved through community education, should lead to increased public support for the fire department and its programs and higher customer satisfaction (a safer community).

Market Research

The first step in planning any program is the Identification Step. Here you need to: 1) identify who are your customers; 2) identify the needs of your customers; 3) list the audiences you are currently reaching; 4) list the educational materials currently being used (curricula, videos, brochures, handouts); 5) identify customer satisfaction with your current program (is it meeting their needs?); 6) list additional audiences that need to be reached; and 7) list additional educational materials that are needed.

Who Are Your Customers?

First, identify who your customers are. It is important to note that there are two types of customers, external and internal. The external customers are the citizens you serve and the public officials who control the budget or those officials whose support you require. It is the external customer to whom you will be delivering your program. The internal customer consists of those firefighters and/or teaching staff with whom you will be working. It is important to realize that their support is vital. For the purposes of this guidebook, the customers are the students and adults you will be teaching.

Identification (Continued)

Identify Your Customers' Needs

The second step is to identify the needs of your customers. It is here that the bulk of your research will be conducted. You must begin by collecting data from your incident reports on deaths, injuries, property loss, incident types, locations and times of day. This will help you determine what your fire and life safety problems are, where and when they occur and who is affected. All of this information will help you identify the behaviors that need to be addressed and the target audiences you need to reach in the programs that you implement. Once you have an idea of the target audience you need to ask these questions: What do members of your audience think is the best way to reach them? Do you need an interpreter? How large will the group be? What is their current knowledge of fire safety? Find out if there are any cultural, developmental or traumatic fire experiences you should be aware of. Find out about the past relationships between the schools and the fire department.

Identify Current Education Programs

The third step is to list the audiences that you are currently reaching (for example a senior group or preschool) and the curricula or other materials you are currently using (such as Remembering When® or Learn Not To Burn®).

Review Current Programs

Review your current education programs. You might find they need improvement. Rate current customer satisfaction or level of knowledge. This can be accomplished by using a pre-test in the schools to rate student knowledge or by using a community survey to rate effectiveness of fire safety programs. If you use a pre-test you must make sure that the survey is age appropriate. Good examples of pre/post tests can be found in the Learn Not to Burn ® Resource Books. The data obtained here will be used as a benchmark for conducting the Evaluation step.

Identify Programs that Meet Needs

The last step is to make a list of the audiences and educational programs or materials you feel may meet the needs you have identified.

After you have completed your identification process, you will know who your customers are, what they need, and how well you are currently meeting those needs. You will also have a benchmark to use when conducting your evaluation. You can now move on to Selection.