An Explanation of the Senior SAFE Program for Families and Care Providers

What is Senior SAFE?

In Massachusetts, adults aged 65 and older are more likely to die in fires than any other age group. In 2014, the Senior SAFE grant program was created to address fire safety for older adults. The program was approved by the Massachusetts State Legislature and is funded through the Fire Standard Compliant (FSC) Cigarette program. It provides funding to local fire departments to improve fire and life safety of older adults through education that addresses the unique fire risks of this age group.

Fire Risks

Physical and mental changes occur during the aging process that may limit the ability of older adults to react quickly in an emergency. Changes in vision, hearing, sense of touch, memory, cognitive ability and mobility may impact safety. Fire risks for this age group include:

- Cooking
- Smoking
- Heating
- Electrical
- Use of home or medical oxygen

Fire Risks for Older Adults

- Cooking
- Smoking
- Heating
- Electrical
- Use of home or medical oxygen

Partnerships

Senior SAFE educators are community leaders who can provide firsthand knowledge of the dangers associated with fire; age appropriate information on preventing and surviving fires; and education that affects changes in older adult behavior. But educators cannot work alone. Senior SAFE is designed to create partnerships between older adults and fire departments through established providers of senior support services such as councils on aging, senior centers, visiting nurse associations, and other similar agencies.

Initiatives

Local fire departments are not limited to education activities at senior centers. Senior SAFE aims to improve the safety of older adults at home because the majority of injuries occur at home. Fire educators can install new, or replace outdated smoke and carbon monoxide alarms

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and test and replace batteries. They can also install house numbers, heat limiting devices on stoves, in-hood stove fire extinguishers, and nightlights. Fire educators can also provide fall prevention interventions. Home visits where educators help older adults develop and practice home escape plans, review safety issues and plan escape around their abilities are all ways to empower residents. All these educational activities are crucial for keeping older adults safe in their homes.

Department of Fire Services Training

The credibility of Senior SAFE rests on properly trained fire and life safety education specialists. The Massachusetts Firefighting Academy offers training programs for fire educators, including the 5-day *Public Fire and Life Safety Educator* class. This program is based on the National Fire Protection Association's Standard 1035, *Professional Qualifications for Public Fire and Life Safety Educator*. The DFS Fire Data and Public Education provides support to local Senior SAFE programs through in-service trainings on fire and fall prevention, site visits, props, and technical assistance.

Benefits of Senior SAFE

- Training reduces anxiety and empowers older adults so they are able to react correctly to emergency situations.
- Fire departments and senior agencies partner together to help older adults stay safe in their homes and live more independently.
- Fire departments are able to visit homes to replace smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, assess the safety of the home, and make recommendations.
- Fires, burns, and deaths are reduced.
- Older adults are able to live longer and safer in their homes.
- Medical costs due to burn injuries and falls are reduced.

Older Adults and Fire Deaths

Older adults make up 14% of the population but represent about half of all fire deaths. Educating seniors about fire safety can reduce the potential for tragedy when fire occurs.

Golden Heroes

The Golden Hero program was established to recognize older adults who have demonstrated key fire and life safety behaviors such as responding appropriately during an emergency, dialing 911 to report an incident, responding to a fire alarm correctly by promptly exiting a building, or perform a lifesaving medical maneuver. These residents are nominated by fire departments and receive recognition from the State Fire Marshal's office. For a complete list of Golden Heroes and their stories, visit *www.mass.gov/dfs* and search for *Golden Hero Awards*.

More Information

For more information about Senior SAFE, please contact your local fire department's fire prevention office or the DFS Public Education Unit at 978-567-3381.

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