

A Guide to Community Organization

for

FIRE SAFETY

DECEMBER, 1947

**President's Conference on Fire Prevention
Federal Works Building, 18th & F Streets, N.W.
Washington 25, D.C.**

INTRODUCTION

Objectives

The objectives of the President's Conference on Fire Prevention were:

1. To emphasize the ever-present danger by fire to human life and natural resources.
2. To intensify fire safety in every community.
3. To influence responsible public officials to accept their primary responsibility for leadership in fire safety.

Action Program

The Action Program of the Conference established a pattern for the achievement of these objectives within the shortest possible time.

It promulgated two basic recommendations devoted to organizational procedure:

1. A call upon the governor of each of the 48 States to appoint statewide fire safety committees composed of the appropriate public officials and representatives of nongovernmental groups to explore the fire-loss problem for the purpose of setting up a practical fire prevention program and to call a statewide fire safety conference as soon as possible after the President's Conference.
2. A call upon all mayors, city managers or chief executives of all cities, towns, villages or other municipalities to appoint fire safety committees where an effective one does not already exist, composed of both public officials and representatives of nongovernmental organizations, to carry on a continuous campaign of fire safety throughout the year.

This brief pamphlet has been prepared as a guide to the establishment of an effective fire safety committee at the community level. It is confined to a discussion of organizational problems. Detailed information regarding the specific recommendations of the President's Conference on the several aspects of fire safety – the objectives the local committee will seek to achieve – is contained in the report of the six Conference committees. Every member of a local committee should be supplied with copies of all these committee reports.

ORGANIZING THE COMMITTEE FOR FIRE SAFETY

Local Responsibility for Fire Safety

Whatever the type of committee organization, primarily responsibility for fire safety rests with the local authorities. The primary function of the committee is to create public awareness of the fire problems, enlist the active aid of citizens and rally support behind public officials in discharging their responsibility for fire safety.

In many cities and villages throughout the country effective fire safety committees have long been in existence and functioning effectively. Some of these have been appointed by the local mayor, city manager or fire chief, but most of them have been organized under the leadership of the chamber of commerce, junior chamber of commerce, safety council, local insurance board or some other important local business or civic group. Where an established committee is active and doing a good job better results will follow by supporting and strengthening the existing committee rather than by setting up an entirely new one.

Under all circumstances, however, it is desirable to have responsible public officials actively identified with the local fire safety committee and if the mayor, fire chief, building commissioner, superintendent of schools and other public officials whose departments are directly concerned with fire safety are not already included, these officials should be appointed to membership.

Leadership

As in any organized community activity, the success of a fire safety committee in getting results will to a large measure depend upon leadership – the chairman.

Wherever possible the chairman of the local fire safety committee should be a private citizen rather than an elected or appointed public official. This will eliminate any possible political implications. It will tend to bring together all elements of the community in a unified effort. Furthermore, a disinterested private citizen will be more effective in rallying public support behind the local government's fire safety efforts. The mayor, city manager or fire chief may be honorary chairman but the job of active leadership should be entrusted to the most prominent and capable businessman or civic leader who can be secured in the community and who can devote the necessary time to the job.

Committee Representation

Every organized segment of community life should be represented on the fire safety committee. The size of the committee is relatively unimportant as the actual spade-work must in any event be done by small subcommittees. Each organized group should have something worthwhile to

contribute in the way of ideas, manpower established channels for reaching large groups of people.

As before stated, the mayor, city manager or other chief executives should be included, as should every city department even indirectly concerned with the fire safety problem. In every case the fire chief, fire marshal, building commissioner, city attorney and superintendent of schools should be active members. In the larger cities and rural communities county officials as well should be named.

There are a few nongovernmental groups that because of their organizational set-up or past experience in the fire safety field will be in a position to play a major role in the local campaign. These include the chamber of commerce, junior chamber of commerce, community safety council, local Red Cross chapter and the local insurance board.

Representatives of the following groups should be invited and urged to cooperate actively:

1. Churches
2. Farm organizations (Farm Bureau Federation, Farmers' Union, Grange, 4-H Clubs, etc.)
3. Hospitals and Institutions
4. Hotels, night clubs and restaurants
5. Insurance agents
6. Labor union
7. Libraries
8. Manufacturers' associations (industrial plants)
9. Merchants (retail and wholesale)
10. Newspapers
11. Public utilities (gas, light, power, and transportation companies)
12. Radio
13. Schools (parochial, private, public, colleges and universities)
14. Service clubs (Exchange, Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, etc.)
15. Theatres
16. Veterans' organizations
17. Women's organizations
18. Youth organizations (Boy Scouts, Boy's Clubs, Camp Fire Girls, Girl Scouts, etc.)

Committee Organization

The community fire safety committee may have one or more honorary chairmen, an active chairman, and one or more vice chairmen. It should also have a dynamic, energetic secretary who can devote considerable time to its work.

Many of the existing local fire safety committees were patterned after the recommendations of the National Fire Protection Association and the National Fire Waste Council, which provided for the following four subcommittees:

1. Public Fire Protection
2. Laws and Ordinances
3. Structural Improvements
4. Educational Activities

Where this set-up is functioning effectively, no change is recommended.

The subcommittee structure may well vary, however, between communities, and the following suggestions are designed to provide in newly organized communities a more detailed specialization of function and activity on the part of the subcommittee designed to carry on educational activities or arouse community interest and support as well as to follow the organizational pattern of the President's Conference itself.

There are a few small working groups which are essential to the success of any organization for community activity and the following subcommittees are suggested:

1. Industrial
2. Organized Public Support
3. Publicity
4. School
5. Speakers

These should be supplemented by subcommittees patterned after the working organization of the President's Conference, which will require the following additional groups:

1. Building Construction
2. Firefighting Services
3. Laws and Enforcement
4. Fire Prevention Education

In some communities, the following subcommittees may also be needed:

1. Disaster Relief
2. Rural Fire Safety
3. Town Inspection

There is no rule of thumb regarding the size of subcommittees. They should be rather small working groups, but all organizations which have something to contribute should be represented.

The following representation is suggested on the five basic subcommittees:

1. *Industrial* – Fire prevention engineers, labor unions, manufacturers' associations and trade associations.
2. *Organized Public Support* – Representatives of all important business, civic, farm, professional, service and women's groups. Also representatives of newspapers, churches, department stores, schools and theatres.

3. *Publicity* – Local newspaper, radio stations, theatres, publicity experts of chambers of commerce, business groups, department stores, and manufacturing organizations.
4. *School* - Representatives of public, private and parochial schools, county schools, colleges, universities and libraries.
5. *Speakers* – A group of prominent people who can organize and direct a group of competent speakers drawn from every group represented on the fire safety committee.

Subcommittee Chairmen

Leadership is equally essential to the success of the subcommittee activity as to the overall program of the group. Outstanding men or women experienced in the respective fields should be chosen to head each subcommittee. Individuals respected in the community, sincerely interested in the subject of fire safety and in a position to devote a reasonable amount of time and energy to the work are essential if the working subcommittees are to function effectively. Window-dressing names should not be used as chairmen of the working committees.

Executive Committee

It is rather a general practice to include the general chairman, vice-chairman and chairmen of the subcommittee as an Executive Committee or Steering Committee. This small Executive Committee should be given broad powers of authority to act on behalf of the full committee so that too frequent meetings of the larger group will not be necessary. It is a mistake, however, and will sacrifice the interest of the members of the large committee, to allow it to become a mere rubber-stamp group for the Executive Committee.

Meetings

The full membership of the fire safety committee should be called together several times a year. Once a month is a good schedule and there should never be less than four meetings a year.

Subcommittees will meet much more frequently. Some of them will find it necessary to meet once a week and, when preparing for special events such as Fire Prevention Week or Spring Clean-Up, even more frequently.

Meetings should only be called when there is something definite to discuss or report. Members will lose interest rapidly and drop out if called upon to attend unnecessary meetings where nothing happens.

What To Do?

The reports of the several committees of the President's Conference on Fire Prevention contain detailed information and recommendations on all phases of the fire safety problem. These reports should form the basis of the local fire safety campaign.

Here are the principal objectives which each and every local fire safety committee should set before itself as goals:

1. Arouse your community to a realization of the seriousness of the fire problem – to life and to property.
2. Enlist the active cooperation of every man, woman and child to accept his or her responsibility to avoid doing those thoughtless and careless things which cause fires.
3. Eliminate every possible fire hazard.
4. Modernize building codes and fire prevention ordinances to provide maximum fire safety.
5. Rigidly and impartially enforce all building codes and fire prevention ordinances.
6. Make fire prevention education an integral part of school curriculum.
7. Maintain an adequate fire department with consideration to adequate personnel, training and equipment.
8. Be on the alert for all new fire hazards resulting from use of new materials, processes and methods.
9. Rally community support behind public officials to encourage them to accept their responsibility for local fire safety.
10. Encourage fire department to make fire safety inspections in all building used for residential purposes, including private dwellings, in addition to those usually made in mercantile and industrial properties.
11. Organize a community disaster relief plan which can be put into effect immediately in case of necessity.

The fundamental purpose of your local fire safety committee is to work for these goals in your own community. The committee organization and assignments of responsibility should be patterned to implement the earliest attainment of these objectives.

Special Campaigns

There are several periods during the year which offer special opportunities to arouse public interest in your fire safety program.

March – April	Spring Clean-Up
May – October	Grass fires, forest fires and dry weather hazards
October	Fire Prevention Week
October – November	Winter heating hazards
December	Holiday hazards

While your campaign to achieve the eleven objectives previously listed requires a well-planned fifty-two week program, special events such as these may well be occasions for intensifying and stepping up public interest and participation in the campaign.

Special Activities

Through the several committees suggested earlier in this guide, provision should be made to keep the following activities going throughout the year.

1. Supply frequent, timely releases to the newspapers.
2. Supply material for spot announcements and feature programs to the radio stations.
3. Make speakers available for any group requesting them and actively seek such engagements.
4. Organize a community-wide self-inspection campaign in the spring and fall.
5. Arrange for frequent window displays by merchants, insurance agents and public utilities.
6. Provide mailing inserts from time to time to merchants, public utilities, banks and other business organizations.
7. Sponsor poster or essay contests in the schools.
8. Maintain active support of churches.
9. Distribute literature from time to time through schools, youth organizations and employers.
10. Arrange for occasional publicity stunts.
11. Have theatres show fire prevention films, trailers, etc., several times each year.
12. Give adequate recognition to any fireman doing outstanding work in saving life.

While engaging in these activities to arouse and inform the public and to encourage a sense of individual responsibility for fire safety, sight should not be lost of the equally important steps in your community that require official action by various departments of your local governments.

Special committees should be continually working with city authorities to:

1. Modernize and improve building codes and fire prevention ordinances.
2. Secure rigid and uniform enforcement of all fire safety codes and laws.
3. Provide maximum efficiency of personnel and equipment in the fire department.
4. Maintain adequate water supply.
5. Establish fire prevention education as an integral part of all school instruction.

The chart on Page 9 may be helpful in indicating in graphic fashion activities of the various groups in your community in the field of fire safety:

<p>The most effective spearhead for the fire safety activity in any community will be the Community Fire Safety Committee. Each community, however, is made up of a number of segments, within which varying degrees of organization, responsibility and authority have been developed. It follows, therefore, that an ACTIVITIES TABLE, such as appears on this page, must of necessity be so designed as to serve as a guide for the activities of the most casually organized segment, and at the same time be flexible enough to serve as a check list for the well organized group – an outline for its committee activities which will supplement as well as implement the work of the Community Fire Safety Committee.</p>	CHURCHES	FARM ORGANIZATIONS – Farm Bureaus, Federations, Farmers’ Unions, Granges, 4H Clubs, etc.	HOSPITALS and INSTITUTIONS	HOTELS, NIGHT CLUBS and RESTAURANTS	INSURANCE AGENTS – Individuals and Associations	LABOR UNIONS	MANUFACTURES (Industrial Plants)	LIBRARIES	MERCHANTS (Retail and Wholesale)	NEWSPAPERS and PUBLICATIONS	PUBLIC UTILITIES	RADIO and TELEVISION	SCHOOLS	SERVICE CLUBS – Exchange, Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, etc.	THEATRES	VETERANS’ ORGANIZATIONS	WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS	YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS – Boy Scouts, Boys’ Clubs, Camp Fire Girls, Girl Scouts, etc.,
Cooperate with your Community Fire Safety Committee.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Arouse a realization of the seriousness of the fire problem to life and property.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Organize a campaign to eliminate all careless acts which cause fires.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Eliminate every possible fire hazard in homes, shops, offices, or places of work or recreation.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Campaign for a fire department adequate in personnel, training, and equipment.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Train and prepare your members for service, at a moment’s notice, on Disaster Relief Forces.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Cooperate with efforts to modernize building codes and fire prevention ordinances	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Cooperate in campaigns for the maintenance of adequate water supply and modern fire alarm installations.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Comply with and enforce all building codes and fire prevention ordinances in all premises.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Urge fire prevention education as an integral part of the school curriculum.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Be on alert for all new fire hazards resulting from the use of new materials, process or methods.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

These segments should keep in constant touch with the Community Committee since they are, in fact, the reservoir from which leaders and workers will be drawn to make that work of the Community Fire Safety Committee effective the year round. In this way activities may be correlated and duplication eliminated.

For brevity, general terms are used in the Activities Table. For example – “Churches” means all sects and religious organizations, as well as groups within each sect: “Schools” will cover schools of all types, parochial, private and public, colleges and universities, school boards, teachers’ associations, clubs, fraternities and alumni groups: and “Public Utilities” – gas, light, power, communication and transportation companies.

Literature, films, and advice may be secured through the following organizations:

National Board of Fire Underwriters, 85 John Street, New York 7, New York.
National Fire Protection Association, 60 Batterymarch Street, Boston 10, Mass.
National Safety Council, 20 North Wacker Drive, Chicago 6, Illinois.
Underwriters Laboratories, Inc., 108 East Ohio Street, Chicago 11, Illinois.
Western Actuarial Bureau, 222 West Adams Street, Chicago 6, Illinois.

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