

The President's Conference on

**FIRE
PREVENTION**



*Report of Committee on
Organized Public Support*

Departmental Auditorium
Washington, D.C.

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“The serious losses in life and property resulting annually from fires cause me deep concern. I am sure that such unnecessary waste can be reduced. The substantial progress made in the science of fire prevention and fire protection in this country during the past forty years convinces me that the means are available for limiting this unnecessary destruction.”

Harry S. Truman

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON ORGANIZED PUBLIC SUPPORT

Objectives of the Conference. – At its first meeting, the Coordinating Committee, was charged with the responsibility for organizing the President’s Conference on Fire Prevention, agreed upon the broad objectives that this national effort should seek to accomplish.

The paramount objective was to emphasize to the American public the ever-present danger of fire to human life and material resources, in order to intensify the work of fire safety in every community in the country.

The Coordinating Committee then stated emphatically that to do this, the highest officials of the States and municipalities must be brought to accept direct responsibility for fire safety in their respective jurisdictions; and public support from every possible source behind these officials must be enlisted, so that adequate laws and ordinances for fire prevention and fire protection can be enacted and enforced.

The attendants at the Conference, and the members of the six committees that worked for months preparing for it, have been drawn from the ranks of public officials – Federal, State and municipal – and from other groups whose support is essential to achieve the goals established. This Conference is truly the first national approach to the fire problem in which all segments of our national life – official and nongovernmental – have worked together, bringing into the fire safety field in a more active way great new forces and agencies, thus giving assurance of added emphasis to the work in the future.

Functions of the Committee on Organized Public Support. – The statement of objectives itself definitely outlines the purpose and functions of the Committee on Organized Public Support. The major emphasis, in all publicity and promotion in connection with the President’s Conference and thereafter, should be on safety to life.

The Committee is not a mere publicity or promotional group appointed to advertise the Conference, to assist in building up attendance, and then to sink into obscurity. Rather, as the name indicates, it is a group representing many of the important national, civic, service, business, fraternal, labor, farm, veteran, and similar men’s, women’s, and youth’s organizations that have either a humanitarian or an economic interest in fire safety – the protection of human life and the conservation of material resources. Each of the above-named groups has the organizational facilities, the know-how, and the manpower to render valuable assistance in promoting the purpose of the Conference. They are the groups that can contribute most importantly to developing organized public support throughout the nation.

Community organization essential. – Furthermore, the representatives of the organizations making up this Committee recognize that the real work of fire safety must be done at the community level – at the grass roots. They foresee that their principal opportunity for constructive service will come after the Conference is over, when they implement the action program through their own organizational facilities. Each representative realizes that while fire

prevention may not be his organization's principal function, it is a field of activity that demands the attention of every intelligent American citizen. As good citizen groups, these organizations must make every effort to develop interest in the subject among their constituents.

All agree that in the last analysis the success of the Conference will depend to considerable extent upon these important national groups undertaking an aggressive fire safety program, based on the recommendations of the Conference. Furthermore, they are aware of the vital importance of having their organizations, through regional, State, and local subdivisions, extend fullest cooperation to the appropriate responsible official agencies and public officials.

The challenge. – It should be superfluous to dwell in detail upon the tragic situation that prompted the President of the United States to call this national Conference on Fire Prevention. The appalling sacrifice of life and property in fires – most of them – preventable – is an unfortunate commentary upon our American civilization. Day by day in the public press it is spelled out in grim statistics.

The American people are at least temporarily shocked out of their lethargy and indifference by holocausts such as the La Salle Hotel fire or the Winecoff Hotel fire, when great loss of life is concentrated in a single conflagration. The public is much less aware of the daily toll - 365 days in the year – in thousands of less spectacular fires that leave behind them a trail of dead and maimed, as well as smoking ashes and ruins.

Even a nation as prodigiously endowed with natural resources and with wealth and economic stability as the United States cannot continue to absorb, without permanent impairment, the profligate loss, year after year, of a half billion dollars in irreplaceable material resources. In the present era, when there is a universal scarcity of nearly every commodity needed to feed, clothe, and shelter both our own people and the starving and war-torn world about us, the destruction becomes not only more tragic but completely inexcusable.

After World War I, the destruction of property by fire rose annually from 1919 to an all time high of \$562,000,000 in 1926. If we permit ourselves to follow the same pattern of constantly rising fire waste in the present post-war years, by 1953 our annual fire loss will exceed the staggering total of one billion dollars.

Fire prevention and accident prevention employ same technique. – Over the years, the approaches to the accident problem have been popularly designated as the Three E's of Safety – Engineering, Enforcement, and Education. These Three E's are equally applicable to fire prevention and protection.

The purpose of this Conference has been to collect, organize, analyze, and evaluate all of the information available about successful techniques and methods that apply to the problem of fire prevention and fire protection. We have carefully surveyed every phase of activity and have fully recognized the importance of Engineering and Enforcement, as well as Education.

It is generally agreed that much can be accomplished in the improvement of the desperate fire waste situation facing our country through fostering and encouraging a greater sense of

individual responsibility on the part of each citizen. Carelessness and recklessness – the human element – constitute a major contribution to our annual toll of death and destruction by fire. But the educational approach or hortatory appeal has its limitation. It must be fortified and supported by the application of modern scientific methods and techniques of construction, protection, firefighting, and statutory requirements. These are the roles of Engineering and Enforcement in the fire prevention field. The importance of each approach is recognized in the balanced, comprehensive Action Program of the Conference.

The task before this committee. – The task of the Committee on Organized Public Support, and particularly of the important national organizations that compose its membership, is twofold.

In the days ahead, there will be a constantly growing need for much wider and more effective public information and education about the fire problem. In this way, the interest of every citizen must be aroused and he must be made to feel a sense of personal responsibility. Full and effective use must be made of every proven medium for reaching the public, including newspapers, radio, motion pictures, magazines, trade papers, outdoor advertising, direct mail, and organized personal appeal. Each organization represented on the Committee on Organized Public Support can best determine for itself the activity that it can undertake to further this vital work of public education.

There will also be a corresponding demand to create an informed public support behind the public officials – State and local – in their effort to bring about the enactment and enforcement of adequate standards and safeguards for the protection of life and property.

Included in the membership of this Committee are the organizations that can contribute most importantly to these goals.

We recognize that the biggest contribution our Committee can make to the success of the President's Conference will be through the implementation of the Action Program by the individual national groups comprising our membership. Nevertheless, after careful study and analysis of the job to be done, we have drafted a few basic recommendations that we believe will provide the essential machinery to most effectively capitalize the recommendations of this Conference for the benefit of the nation.

OFFICIAL PROGRAM

1. We recommend that a Continuing Committee be appointed by the General Chairman in order to implement the Action Program of the President's Conference, measure the progress made in States, cities, and rural communities throughout the country in the months following the Conference, and keep up the interest in fire prevention on the part of the large number of important national, nongovernmental groups represented on the Committee on Organized Public Support, as well as on the part of the general public.

- a. We suggest that the personnel of this Continuing Committee include representatives of the organizations composing the membership of the

Coordinating Committee, together with the secretaries of the six Conference committees.

- b. This Continuing Committee should have a secretary and whatever small secretariat is necessary to carry on its work effectively.
- c. In recommending the appointment of this Continuing Committee, we have no thought of establishing a new agency to deal with fire prevention on a national scale, either as an official or voluntary group. The purpose of the Continuing Committee is solely to follow up after the Conference and make certain that the entire Nation benefits from the recommendations made and the interest created.
- d. We propose that the Continuing Committee function primarily through the facilities offered by the large number of nongovernmental, national, regional, and State organizations represented on the Committee on Organized Public Support.

2. We recommend that each of the Governors of the 48 States and territories, and the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, appoint Statewide fire safety committees composed of the appropriate public officials, including State foresters and representatives of nongovernmental groups, to explore the fire loss problem in all its ramifications within their respective jurisdictions, so that practical fire prevention programs can be set up that are tailored to the needs of each particular area.

- a. As soon as possible after the President's Conference on Fire Prevention, a Statewide fire safety conference should be called by each of the Governors.
- b. We urge that each of the organizations composing the Committee on Organized Public Support, and any other interested organizations, be invited to serve on the State fire safety committees and to participate in the Statewide fire safety conference through its appropriate State unit or representative.

3. Where an effective fire prevention committee does not already exist, we recommend that the mayor, city manager, or chief executive of each city, town, or municipality shall appoint a fire safety committee, composed of both public officials and representatives of nongovernmental organizations, to carry on a continuous campaign of fire safety throughout the year.

- a. We urge that each of the organizations composing the Committee on Organized Public Support, and any other interested organizations, shall be invited to serve on the local fire safety committees through its appropriate local unit.
- b. In counties that are primarily rural, local county or community fire safety committees should be created.
- c. State and local fire safety committees should give special attention to helping to secure long term loans on favorable terms to be used for repairs essential to safety of life.

4. We recommend that each of the national and State organizations represented on the Committee on Organized Public Support shall endorse and support, within the limits of the objectives set forth in their charter, constitution, or bylaws, the recommendations of the President's Conference on Fire prevention. Each organization should extend the fullest cooperation possible at the national, State, and local levels.

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