Learning Objective: *The student will be able to identify the five areas of vulnerability in a community.*

The purpose of this training is to explain the concept of vulnerability and its relationship to overall community risk from a firefighting perspective. Each hazard must be viewed from the community's vulnerability. Vulnerability is the susceptibility to suffer harm or loss from an event. Vulnerability may vary based on numerous factors such as preparedness, capability of emergency services, etc. Vulnerability also may vary for the same hazard from area to area in the same community. There are five areas of vulnerability in a community:

Wildfires are often considered an environmental vulnerability as they can destroy an entire forest.

1. **Human vulnerability** includes the cost in personal injury and death due to an event. This also could include displacement from the community and human suffering.

2. **Economic vulnerability** includes the cost to provide emergency services, the cost to replace or repair damaged property, the availability and cost of insurance, lost tax revenue, lost wages, the cost of business interruption, and medical costs, both short and long term.

3. **Social vulnerability** is the potential for an event to have a negative effect on the social fabric of a community. For example, frequent crimes against persons or property can cause people in certain areas of the community to feel unsafe. Arson is an example of a crime that can have a serious effect on the social stability of neighborhoods. Also, large-scale events such as natural disasters can have a serious long-term impact on the social systems in communities. Likewise, an event like Columbine can result in the long-term need for additional mental health and social services.

4. **Political vulnerability** includes the cost of passing or not passing legislation that have an impact on the health and safety of the community. Unfortunately, as we have seen, many people have to die in order for change to occur. One of the most tragic examples of this was the fire in 1911 at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City that killed 146 people, mostly young women. This fire resulted in some of the most sweeping changes to government's regulation of business in our history. More recently, the Station Nightclub fire in 2003 resulted in sweeping changes in fire and building codes not only in Rhode Island but in a number of other States as well.

5. **Environmental vulnerability** is the potential for an event to cause temporary or permanent damage to the environment within a community. These are seen in severe droughts or hailstorms that can destroy crops and/or livestock; tornadoes, floods, and mudslides that can permanently alter the terrain; or a wildfire that can destroy an entire forest.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). *Leadership Strategies in Community Risk Reduction*, August 2010.