

GREATER MANCHESTER FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE



ALARM Award Submission 2007

Category: PEOPLE

Home Fire Risk Assessment Strategy

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

Executive Summary

Sadly most of the fire related deaths and injuries we witness are a result of fire in the home. However, it's more distressing to know that many of these fires are accidental and therefore preventable. Between 1st April 2002 and 31st March 2003 we recorded 3532 accidental dwelling fires; of these only 35% had a smoke alarm that sounded and warned the occupants of the fire and more disturbing is that in 2004 75% of the fatal fires attended by GMFRS did not have a working smoke alarm.

In order to reduce the number of accidental domestic dwelling fires, increase smoke alarm ownership and promote fire safety awareness, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) have united with local partner organisations such as Social Services, Police and Housing Providers, to encourage vulnerable members of the community to take advantage of our free Home Fire Risk Assessments (HFRA) and to help us with the installation of smoke alarms.

Conducting HFRA is about educating householders to prevent fires. However, it is also to ensure that if fires do occur, they are detected early enough to save lives, prevent injuries and minimise fire damage. As well as giving fire safety advice and developing escape plans a HFRA provides direct contact between GMFRS and the public; it is an opportunity to protect a property and the people that live in it but also to raise awareness of the whole fire agenda. A HFRA involves a comprehensive fire risk assessment of the home and the provision of fire protection equipment such as a smoke alarm, where appropriate.

Using our strong borough partnerships we have been able to raise 'fire' on the local authority agenda and for the first time, as a member of the Local Area Agreement (LAA), used stretch targets to attract funding. In addition to our HFRA strategies we also launched a huge media campaign in support of our fire safety initiatives. The service made a decision to promote the campaign whilst a multi-fatal incident, which killed a mother and three children, was still headline news to bring the issue of smoke alarm ownership to the attention of the public.

Our approach has proved successful in increasing the number of HFRA undertaken and current statistics are showing reductions in fire related deaths and injuries. We expect to see further reductions as we attempt to achieve our 5 year target of ensuring every household in Greater Manchester has a working smoke alarm.

Main Submission - A Clear Need

Fire in the home is one of the most devastating occurrences an individual can experience and beyond the personal suffering a fire in the home can affect the wider community in terms of its emotional and physical impact and economic cost. The Communities and Local Government (CLG – formerly known as ODPM) report, “The Economic Cost of Fire: estimates for 2004”, puts the average cost of a domestic fire at £24,900. In 2004/05 GMFRS recorded 3525 accidental dwelling fires. This equates to an approximate cost to the local economy of £87,772,500.

Our community fire safety initiatives have been commended by the Audit Commission as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process and we will continue to invest in these initiatives, redirecting resources to increase our activity. However, as we continue with our success in reducing the number of fire deaths and injuries, it becomes increasingly challenging to reach those who remain at greatest risk. Our partners help us to identify hard to reach groups and we continue to work together in addressing the five focus factors; health, education, housing, employment and crime, in order to build ‘Stronger Safer Communities’.

Although fires can occur in any domestic property, our historical data shows that they occur more frequently in specific areas of the county. This is evidenced in the Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) model, a CLG developed software package, used by GMFRS to identify areas of risk across the county. Data sharing with our partner agencies has enabled us to overlay our FSEC data with the vulnerable localities index (VLI) used by Greater Manchester Against Crime (GMAC), an innovative and unique 'Partnership Business Model', conceived, developed and delivered by all 10 Crime and Disorder Partnerships in Greater Manchester. This process has shown a high degree of synergy between the two data sets further strengthening the importance of partnership working and the need to share information.

GMFRS has to comply with PSA 3 (The Fire and Rescue National Framework Public Service Agreement) which is, “No local fire and rescue authority having a fatality rate, from accidental fires in the home, more than 1.25 times the national average.” And; “By 2010, reduce the number of accidental fire related deaths in the home by 20% and the number of deliberate fires by 10%”. To assist in achieving this we will continue to target the areas where risk of fire is highest and HFRAs will form a key part of this strategy, with the intention of providing every home in Greater Manchester with a working smoke alarm.

Main Submission - Our Approach

In 2004, the CLG provided funding for the modernisation of the Fire Service. They also provided a special grant, “The Community Fire Safety Innovation Fund”, which applied to all Fire and Rescue

Services where the level of fire deaths was more than 1.25 times the national average, and was provided to drive down the number of accidental fire deaths. We used this funding to establish a number of 'Target Fire' teams across Greater Manchester. The principle of 'Target Fire' was to "target" the top 20% of properties in each of the 10 districts most at risk from fire. Each Target Fire team consisted of two members of staff (recruited and trained by GMFRS) and each team carried out approximately 50 HFRA's per week.

The funding for 'Target Fire' was due to end in March 2006. However, we were keen as an organisation to continue to provide HFRA's to the vulnerable members of our community and so started to look at how we could use our existing resources. In May 2005, with the introduction of our new Service Delivery structure and Borough Commands, Operational Crews began to undertake HFRA's. These personnel, as part of their overall role to protect the community are now completing approximately 100 HFRA's per borough, per week. This decision has proved to be the most cost effective and efficient in terms of output and value for money.

There are over 2.5 million people in Greater Manchester and 1.1 million domestic properties. Our aspirational aim is to have at least one working smoke alarm in every home in Greater Manchester within the next 5 years. It is estimated 80% smoke alarm ownerships already exists which means we will have to install smoke alarms to 200,000 properties within the period (01 April 2005 to 01 April 2010).

Main Submission - Innovation

In order to further enhance awareness in the community and to encourage residents to accept the offer of a HFRA, we launched a dedicated media campaign. At the beginning of the campaign we carried out television, newspaper and radio interviews with numerous local and national broadcasting agencies (see the 'Who Helped' section). The Manchester Evening News agreed to run our campaign, offering readers a free HFRA and each night for a week the paper carried an editorial and HFRA application form. Other local newspapers also included the application form and local authority and housing association newsletters were used to further promote the service to householders. We also:

- Enlisted the help and support of local MPs - visiting the home of Rochdale MP Cyril Smith, to carry out a HFRA, with photographs of the visit appearing in the media. Letters were also sent to all local MPs and Local Authority Chief Executives.
- Launched a high profile advertising campaign which included a 4 week TV campaign – with many prime spots and a 2 week radio campaign on Key 103.
- The Key 103 promotion team and fire crews went out into Manchester City Centre and handed out 5000 leaflets to shoppers.

- Firefighters carried leaflets and whenever they attended a house fire they posted leaflets through the letter boxes of all homes in the surrounding area.
- Fire safety checks were demonstrated on TV and on radio we explained how we carry out Fire Safety checks.
- We attended a major event in Manchester, “Gay Pride”, where we distributed specially designed condom packs advertising our HFRA’s. The packs were also given to all clubs and pubs in Manchester’s “Gay Village”.
- As the campaign developed we focussed on “hard to reach” groups, including ethnic minorities, by using interpreters and specifically worded leaflets.

GMFRS’ borough based Service Delivery structure focuses on delivering a service at local level in conjunction with local community groups and other agencies. In practice this means that each Borough Command has to determine its individual strategies and apply them in agreement with others. A previous problem has been the availability of resources or monies to undertake specific projects outside of the normal working parameters. As a solution to this problem, the Innovations and Partnerships Approval Board (IPAB) was established in April 2006. Although the IPAB Process is still in its infancy, several bids have now been approved and various community fire safety initiatives, which support our overall HFRA strategy, are now being implemented across the Boroughs. Examples of the types of initiatives being funded are as follows:

- First Choice Homes, the largest social housing provider in Oldham, has entered a partnership with GMFRS and have allocated £2 million to install hard-wired smoke alarms in all renovations, as well as the existing requirements for new builds. A partnership has also been established between GMFRS and the Oldham Physical and Sensory Disability Services to jointly provide multi-alerters for people who are deaf or significantly hard of hearing.
- In Trafford, a Neighbourhood Renewal Team (NRT) is being established to reduce the impacts of crime and environmental and social deprivation. GMFRS are providing a dedicated resource (Fire Service Neighbourhood Co-ordinator) as an integral part of the NRT to assist with the reduction of accidental and deliberate primary and secondary fires within the Old Trafford area. In addition to the obvious reduction in BVPIs we believe that this increased community cohesion will lead to reductions in the number of hoax calls, attacks on Fire Fighters and deliberate fire related incidents.
- Tameside Borough has established a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with New Charter Housing whereby every new tenant agrees to have a HFRA as part of their tenancy agreement. New Charter has also contributed funding to provide new tenants with thermostatically controlled deep fat fryers, if they are considered to be particularly high risk.

As well as the specific initiatives mentioned, GMFRS is currently developing a new corporate strategy to engage the Community and Voluntary Sector in establishing a volunteer fire fighter network (similar to the Police Specials). This will provide opportunities for people who want to join the service and others (including retired firefighters) to contribute to our corporate objectives and will in turn give us more community cohesion and a greater presence in the communities we serve.

Main Submission - Who Helped

Meals on wheels, Age Concern, Environmental Agencies, Youth Services (i.e. Youth Offending Teams), Drug and Alcohol Teams, Crime and Disorder Teams, Education Authorities, Benefits Agencies, Police, Housing Providers/Associations, Warmer Home Scheme (Manchester), Local Councils, Social Services, Physical and Sensory Disability Services (Oldham).

We have also gained huge support from:

- Sky News, BBC National, ITV, BBC24, BBC Northwest, Channel M;
- Key 103, BBC GMR, Century FM, Rock FM, Tower, Revolution, Imagine; and
- Sunday Mirror, Manchester Evening News, Rochdale Observer and Other national and local newspapers.

Main Submission - Schedule of Evidence

- An increase in LPI 16 - number of home fire risk assessments undertaken.
- Reductions in **BVPI 143 (i)** – the number of deaths arising from accidental dwelling fires per 100, 000 population, **BVPI 143 (ii)** – the number of injuries (exc. precautionary checks) arising from accidental dwelling fires per 100, 000 population, **BVPI 209 (ii)** - The % of fires attended in dwellings where a smoke alarm was fitted but did not activate and **BVPI 209 (iii)** - The % of fires attended in dwellings where no smoke alarm was fitted.
- An increase in **BVPI 209 (i)** – The % of fires attended in dwellings where a smoke alarm had activated
- The smoke alarm campaign was praised in the House of Commons.
- Press releases, newspaper articles, TV adverts, radio and news interviews.
- Innovations and Partnerships Approvals Bids and meeting minutes.
- Gold Award in the 2006 CIPR NW (The Chartered Institute of Public Relations North West) PRide Awards.