



Coffee Break Training - Fire Prevention and Public Education

The Impact of Fire

No. FM-2011-6 July 21, 2011

Learning Objective: The student will be able to identify five ways fires can impact communities.

Fires can take their tolls on communities in various ways. The effects or costs can be measured in economic, organizational, legal, political, and psychological impacts.

Economic Impact: The immediate effects of fires can be seen in loss of homes or places of employment. Long-term effects can be found in higher insurance premiums, lost jobs and income, medical costs, and effects on fire protection.

Organizational Impact: When an incident occurs resulting in a substantial structural loss, serious injury, or death, emergency services can be affected directly and indirectly. These can be manifested in the following ways:

- **Morale:** Some individuals within the department may feel they have failed or that the department is not up to standard.
- **Recruitment:** When morale is low, personnel may leave or it may become more difficult to recruit new members.
- **Cost:** If the fire department is not successful in its mission, it may have difficulty obtaining community support for funds and equipment. An incident also may affect the department in terms of increased operating costs and lost or damaged equipment.

Legal Impact: In today's legal environment, any type of incident can generate civil litigation. A tenant may bring litigation against a building owner for monetary losses, injury, or death. The building owner may pursue litigation if the tenant was in some way responsible for the cause or spread of the fire. An owner may bring litigation against the fire department itself if he/she believes that the department failed to take proper and appropriate actions in firefighting and in fire prevention. Regardless of the underlying reason, litigation results in substantial financial costs and time lost by both parties. While the fire may be over in a matter of hours, the subsequent litigation may continue for years.

Psychological Impact: Nearly every fire has psychological effects on those burned, family and friends of those injured or killed, property owners, tenants, department members, and the community-at-large.

Political Impact: A fire loss can have political effects through loss of jobs, reduction in the tax base, loss of housing units, increases in insurance ratings/costs, and abandoned buildings. These conditions also can result in a deterioration of areas or neighborhoods, which in turn provides a breeding ground for additional fire losses.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). *Marketing Fire Prevention in Your Community*, August 2001.



Home fires may lead to larger problems such as loss of tax revenue, increased insurance ratings and costs, and a deterioration of neighborhoods.

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