



# Position Statement

## Community Risk Reduction for Fire and Emergency Services

*Submitted by the IAFC Fire & Life Safety Section*

**PROBLEM STATEMENT:** Fire and emergency service agencies have experienced a radical and often rapid shift in public expectations and service demands over the last few decades. As a result, now more than ever, fire services respond to many more types of incidents than just fires. These incidents, like fires, present firefighters not only with new challenges, but also with new opportunities to engage the communities they serve. This expanded role represents a culture change to many in the fire service, but one that remains incomplete. In truth, this culture change must extend beyond emergency response and stimulate fire service action in communities even before the call comes in.

**BACKGROUND:** In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, fire service was the responsibility of every household, with each required to keep a fire bucket at the ready and answer the call to help their neighbors. The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of fire as a community concern that involved dedicated investments in personnel, training, and equipment. Technological advances in the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about urbanization, infrastructure, and the first efforts to standardize building regulations. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, firefighting and fire prevention rose to the challenges of industrialization and urbanization through greater organization and professionalization, which in turn led to an expanded role for firefighters in technical rescue, emergency medical services, hazardous materials response, and many other disciplines. The early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought about greater insights into the nature and structure of the challenges facing communities, and with these insights greater demand for evidence-based solutions to public safety problems.

**A NEW KIND OF RESPONSE:** Community risk reduction reflects this evolution of responsibility and capability, and embodies the full spectrum of readiness, response, and recovery activities performed by fire and emergency service organizations. In the past, many fire and emergency service organizations prepared for the worst and hoped for the best. Today, the demands on these agencies require a more comprehensive strategy, one that neither assumes the inevitability of incidents nor expects optimum or ideal outcomes from every intervention. Such an approach considers the risks of alternate courses of action

or inaction in the context of both frequency and consequences. Evidence-based interventions seek to address outcomes, not just manage inputs or improve outputs. As such, the fire and emergency service can no longer rely only upon the information at their fingertips. They have to dig deeper, engage citizens and stakeholders with empathy, and take a critical approach to assessing their own operations in light of costs and consequences.

**LEADERSHIP FOR A NEW APPROACH:** Fire chiefs play the central and most critical roles in driving the community risk reduction process. Without their buy-in and commitment to making decisions based on the best available evidence in partnership with the communities they serve, the fire and emergency service risks putting their own interests over and above those of their communities. Public expectations take many more forms than calls for service placed to 911. Indeed, many, if not most, 911 calls received today involve non-urgent demands. How agencies understand and respond to these demands not only requires the skills to manage incident interventions, but also the ability to engage citizens and stakeholders in efforts that change behaviors and beliefs.

**NEW POLICY PRIORITIES:** The International Association of Fire Chiefs, through its Fire & Life Safety Section, is committed to leading the change required to reduce community risks through citizen and stakeholder engagement. Community risk reduction (CRR) programs embody the core of these efforts, and reflect a comprehensive, evidence-based, all-hazards and all-risks strategy to identify, mitigate, respond, and recover. CRR involves every aspect of the fire and emergency service, but it emphasizes proactive measures and partnerships.

**CALL TO ACTION:** Successful efforts by fire chiefs to implement community risk reduction strategies in their communities require immediate and specific actions, including the following:

- Collecting and analyzing data and information from a wide variety of sources to identify the specific hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities in the community.
- Analyzing data and information to produce insights regarding the costs, consequences, causes, and contributing factors driving risks in the community.
- Engaging interested and affected parties within the community in interest-based discussions to identify, prioritize, treat, and measure risks and the outcomes of intervention strategies.

- Focusing effort at the station level to stimulate involvement and action by every firefighter.
- Engaging members of vulnerable populations in their homes to assess behaviors and conditions increase risk of injury or death.
- Empowering and equipping people to take individual and collective action to eliminate hazards, reduce risks, and improve conditions in communities.
- Establishing quantitative and qualitative performance measures and evaluating the impacts of interventions.
- Recognizing and sharing success stories with others inside and outside the interested and affected community.

The Board of Directors of the International Association of Fire Chiefs adopts this position paper as a commitment to developing and supporting efforts within the Fire & Life Safety Section; Safety, Health and Survival Section; Emergency Medical Services Section; Company Officers Section; Volunteer and Combination Officers Section, and its regional divisions to develop the resources and materials fire chiefs require to successfully lead community risk reduction efforts in their communities.

**Submitted by the IAFC Fire & Life Safety Section**  
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