



Public Education in Your Community

Pictured at left: Lieutenant Luke Pierce, EMT/Firefighter from Virden Fire Protection District, using the hands-on method for teaching children about fire prevention and safety during the Annual Fire Safety Day for Kindergartners in the local school district.

Many Fire departments use National Fire Prevention Week as the time to remind their communities on their role in public education and fire safety. Across the state, you hear about and are likely involved in one or more effective programs structured to educate children and adults on fire prevention and home safety.

Public Education programs can be as simple as brochures on smoke alarms, a list of fire safety tips or hosting a special event in honor of Fire Prevention Week. The National Fire Protection Association is an excellent resource for establishing these types of programs.

The following information may be useful to your fire district's planning of an education program or event.

Decide what you want to achieve at your open house, and who your audience is. You'll want to make sure your open house activities reinforce this year's Fire Prevention Week theme and provide useful information on how to prevent and survive a fire. Most likely, kids and parents will be visiting your open house, so messages and activities should be primarily tailored to these age groups.

Pick a date

Your open house can be held during the day or evening, but it must be a time that people in your community are available. Saturday and Sunday afternoons are often most convenient for families, and fewer events tend to take place on weekends. However, your fire department's public educator or coordinator should check the community calendar to make sure there are minimal conflicts.

Ensure adequate staffing and equipment. Emergencies can happen at any time, including during an open house. If your event is being held at a fire station, make sure enough firefighters are available so that even if a crew must leave, there is still staff available to meet with visitors. If the open house includes fire equipment displays, arrange for backup in case an engine or ambulance is needed off-site.

Dress for success

This is your chance to showcase your fire station(s) to your community. Assign someone to dress in the official Sparky the Fire Dog® costume. Make sure the station is clean and inviting, with good signage and theme-related decorations to draw attention.



Have handouts ready

Have handouts available for all age groups. Distribute printed materials that reinforce your Open House's fire safety messages. Pass out fun items to kids and show an NFPA video which will get them excited about the Open House and encourage them to participate in the campaign.

Keep it brief

Generally, the public won't attend an event that requires hours of their time. Visitors should be able to learn at least one positive fire safety action that will help them learn safety messages in 30 minutes or less. Download the free reproducible home escape planning grid at <http://www.nfpa.org>.

Feed them

Nothing draws a crowd like good food. Arrange for a local restaurant or fast food outlet to sponsor and provide refreshments.

Have firefighters cook up their favorite specialty or solicit donations of baked goods from local chefs. Ask local distributors or bottling companies to donate cold soda.

Make it fun

Open houses should be fun! Hold activities that allow visitors to meet firefighters, move around the fire station, and learn about fire safety in the process. Human interaction creates a personal experience for people, and is key to an open house's success. Create hands-on learning opportunities to build participants' safety skills.

Get participation from the top People like to know who their fire chief is, so make sure your bosses are available to meet with visitors. The presence of high-ranking fire and other community officials also will reinforce strong support of your open house.

Promote, promote, promote

No matter how great your open house plans are, it won't be a success if no one knows about it. Publicize your open house at each and every opportunity, and as far in advance as possible. Use the Fire Prevention Week "fill-in-the-blank" news release to promote your open house to local media outlets. You can also publicize your open house by developing and passing out flyers to local businesses and schools; sending letters to civic and religious groups that can announce the open house, printing information in the school calendars sent home to parents, etc. These are just a few suggestions - be creative, and use your resources to your full advantage.

For more information and ideas, please visit the NFPA website.



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