

FOCUS ON

Gwinnett Fire's Risk-Reduction Programs: Stopping Deaths and Injuries Before They Happen

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Nearly all fatalities and injuries firefighters respond to are preventable. That's why Gwinnett Fire and Emergency Services offers extensive public education efforts to teach personal responsibility – starting at an early age – for one's own safety. Changing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors saves lives and prevents catastrophic injuries.

The cost of deaths and injuries from fires and other traumatic events often exceeds hundreds of thousands of dollars per incident. For families and the community as whole, that's a heavy financial burden.

"Fire and life-safety education is an important component in our proactive approach to prevention efforts," says Captain Tommy Rutledge. "Our comprehensive intervention strategies include engineering, enforcement, economic incentives, and emergency response."

Gwinnett Fire offers speakers on a wide variety of topics designed for both children and adults. They group their major programs together under an umbrella called F.A.C.T. (Firefighters and Communities Together). Initiatives include fire safety and injury prevention talks (Community F.A.C.T.), home safety surveys and smoke alarm checks (Residential F.A.C.T.), and a Mobile Fire Safety House program (School F.A.C.T.). Other presentations include safety for seniors, car seat installation and inspections, and training classes in CPR/AED.



Fire Engineer Shannon Daves shows school children a fire truck and explains the different equipment they use to save lives and protect property.



Fire Educator Sylvia Goalen gives instruction on CPR and first aid to interested residents at Fire Headquarters.

Last year, the department provided 1,809 programs to about 125,000 residents, including fire station tours and fire truck visits to schools and civic events. Assisting the paid staff is a group of 67 citizen volunteers – graduates of the department's citizen fire academy. They donated a total of 3,691 hours helping with community outreach efforts.

The Public Information and Education Section is part of the Community Risk Reduction Division and reports to Assistant Chief/Fire Marshal Stephen Hrustich. Staff members are trained and certified to teach fire and life safety, CPR/AED/First Aid, child passenger safety, poison prevention, and Safe Sitter classes and are also state-certified fire inspectors. They are also active in many professional organizations.

To evaluate the impact of their efforts, they look at indicators such as awareness, knowledge levels, and attitudes that show changes in behavior, physical environments, or practices that reduce risk. Over time, the number of emergency responses to different types of incidents correlates directly to risk reduction activities.

Fire Chief Casey Snyder said, “Last year, Gwinnett Fire responded to almost 67,000 calls – and most of those incidents were preventable. I believe risk reduction through education is vitally important.”

For more information on fire safety and injury prevention programs, visit www.gwinnettfire.org. To schedule a program or to ask additional questions, please email fireprograms@gwinnettcounty.com or call 678.518.4845.

