UFF Position Statement:

Fire Community Assessment, Response Evaluation System (FireCARES)

Many communities are experiencing geographic expansion, annexation, and regionalization, while others experience population contraction as they struggle in a weak economy. This situation causes many decision makers to alter fire department resources faster than fire department leaders can evaluate their impact.

Fire chiefs are often faced with public officials who work to balance community expectations and finite budgetary resources without a solid technical foundation for evaluating community risks and the impact of fire department staffing and deployment decisions on the safety of the public and firefighters. Hasty decisions can leave a community without sufficient resources to respond to emergency calls safely, efficiently, and effectively.

Effectively managing these challenges requires a basic understanding of the structural and population risks within a given community and of how changes in levels of fire department resources deployed affect outcomes from emergencies. Failing to manage these challenges can leave individuals, fire departments and communities vulnerable to unacceptable consequences. These consequences may include property loss, personal injury or loss of life, economic loss, interruption of business and related operation, and damage to the environment.

Community risk assessment begins with identification of the type and number of hazards in the community. Once the details of hazards/risks are known, the fire department can plan and deploy resources to manage known risks and respond to mitigate emergencies when they occur.

Recognizing this notion, the Urban Fire Forum and the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs support and embrace the Fire Community Assessment Response Evaluation System (FireCARES). FireCARES is designed and built to assess community risk and structural hazards and fire department response capability and to provide valuable information to assist chiefs and other decision makers in evaluating options and/or solutions to decrease overall community risks and vulnerability.

Considering the potential for negative outcomes if fire department resources do not match the needs in a community, and given the lack of tools available for assessing this match, FireCARES is necessary to provide decision makers a way to evaluate how well fire department resources deployed match community risks, thereby improving outcomes from fire and other emergencies.

FireCARES is easy to use, encourages accurate and timely risk / resource assessment, and provides much needed information to fire chiefs and decision makers allowing them to better plan and budget for safety of the public and firefighters.