

**FIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY
IN THE CITY OF HAMILTON
A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT**

**Summary Report
Prepared for**

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INTRODUCTION

The process of educating the public about Fire Prevention and Fire Safety faces many challenges, not the least of which is effectively communicating to citizens that residential fires can be serious and that it is in one's best interest to take proper precautions. This has become a priority in the city of Hamilton where the number of residential fires and fire deaths has been on the rise. This report contains findings and implications of a focus group study, commissioned by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) in partnership with Emergency Services - Fire for the City of Hamilton, to increase the effectiveness of reaching residents with fire prevention and safety messages, especially in the high risk areas. The residents in high risk areas in Hamilton have characteristics which are not necessarily typical of the city's population as a whole. Some of the key demographics of the residents found in these high risk areas include: low total household income, students, renters, home owners who live in older homes, immigrants and retired seniors.

The idea for this study originated in recommendations provided to NFPA in the 'Urban Fire Safety Project', where the need to more effectively reach high-risk populations in large cities, was identified. The project examined challenges in reaching high-risk audiences; surveyed existing public education, smoke alarm installation and outreach programs; and identified what was working in some cities and could be used by others.

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PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The City of Hamilton has been experiencing an increase in residential fires and fire deaths, particularly in 3 geographical areas of the city: Ward 1, Wards 2 & 3 and Ward 8. Based on the need to reach these high risk groups, Emergency Services – Fire for the City of Hamilton has identified Fire Prevention and Fire Safety as priority areas.

Qualitative Research in the form of Focus Groups was used to explore the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of the residents, in these 3 Ward areas, as it relates to all aspects of fires under the following main topics:

1. Determine what the current knowledge and awareness is relating to fires, including what residents do to prevent fires and what protection measures they would use against fires.
2. Find out what fire safety messages from Emergency Services or other sources are getting through to residents and how these messages are being communicated successfully.
3. Explore the most effective ways to reach people with respect to Fire Prevention and Fire Safety.
4. Determine if residents understand the consequences associated with residential fires including monetary fines.
5. Through discussions with residents, explore what would motivate them to change their behavior, when it comes to the importance of fire safety.

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PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Insights gained from these Focus Groups will be used to make recommendations about ways and methods of increasing Fire Safety awareness and concern among residents.

Conclusions drawn from this research will have implications for fire prevention and safety organizations that are in the business of promoting fire related information.

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METHODS

Focus Groups

Focus groups are facilitated group discussions using a series of questions that are of interest to the researcher. In most cases (including this one), focus group studies are qualitative in nature. Qualitative data can be analyzed to uncover a range of perspectives and themes on a given subject. However, the small sample size and non-random selection of group participants prevent using the findings to draw cause and affect relationships or to generalize the results to the wider population from which the participants were taken. Still, in a few instances, the results may describe a “dominant” or a “widely held or expressed” opinion where there was consensus around some idea or issue.

Focus groups do lead to important insights about topics and allow the facilitator to probe a group’s thinking on matters both scripted and that arise spontaneously through conversation. This feature makes it a more flexible tool than quantitative surveys. Focus groups are also advantageous when compared with conducting one-on-one interviews because they allow participants to feed off of one another’s ideas and spark thoughts that may not have been captured in isolation.

Design

A total of four focus groups were conducted on September 1 and 2, 2009. Each group discussion took place over 2 hours. The number of respondents in Groups 1 through 4 was: 7, 8, 7 and 6, respectively.

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Design cont'd

Laura Sayles, of Sensory Services Ltd., Mississauga, Ontario, worked with the NFPA and Emergency Services – Fire for the City of Hamilton, to outline the study objectives and to design the Moderator’s Guide used during the group discussions (see Moderator’s Guide, Appendix). She acted as the moderator for the groups and has written the final report for this study.

The groups were held at Tri-L Research, a market research field service provider in Hamilton. Tri-L Research recruited group participants for the study according to target groups specifications arrived at through discussions with the NFPA and Emergency Services – Fire for the City of Hamilton. Target group specifications for each of the Wards recruited were as follows (see City of Hamilton Map with Ward Boundaries, Appendix):

Group 1 – Ward 1

- all recruited from Ward 1
- 50% male; 50% female
- mix of ages 18 yrs and up, including adults 65 and older
- include some students who live in student housing and retired seniors
- mix of income ranges
- mix of home owners and renters

Group 2 – Ward 8

- all recruited from Ward 8
- 50% male; 50% female
- mix of ages 18 yrs and up, including adults 65 and older
- include some students who live in student housing and retired seniors
- mix of income ranges
- mix of home owners and renters

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Groups 3 & 4 – Wards 2 & 3

- all recruited from Wards 2 & 3
- 50% male; 50% female
- mix of ages 18 yrs and up, including adults 65 and older
- include some ethnic minorities/new immigrants who can communicate well in English
- income range less than \$45,000, although may be higher, if necessary, to obtain home owners. Unemployed participants are acceptable.
- mainly renters and a few home owners

The following is a brief description of each Ward. Ward 1 is found in the west part of Hamilton. McMaster University is in Ward 1, and it is characterized by a high student population. This Ward has residential housing and student housing. There are also a fair number of seniors living in this Ward.

Wards 2 & 3 are in the lower part of Hamilton. The residents in this Ward area tend to be in a low income bracket. Many immigrants live in this area because of the social assistance programs available. There is an abundance of multiple family dwellings and many of the residents in Wards 2 & 3 are renters.

Ward 8 is situated on the Hamilton Escarpment. It is one of the largest Wards and is the most densely populated. There are two colleges in this Ward. Along with the student population there is also an aging population. The average age of the homes is 60 years. Many single family dwellings have been turned into student rental units.

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Participants' Current Awareness of Fire Safety

Each focus group started with a general question about what the words 'Fire Prevention' brought to mind. Respondents gave a variety of 'Fire Prevention' connotations which included smoke detectors/alarms, fire escape plans, fire extinguishers, fire fighters, minimizing clutter around furnaces and water heaters and no overloading of electrical circuits.

Overall, group participants gave the impression that they were "in the know" with respect to fire safety. When asked how they kept their homes safe, respondents gave a wide range of examples including: maintain smoke detectors, have a smoke detector on every floor of your home, practice a fire escape plan with the whole family, keep rags and clutter away from the furnace area, don't leave pots on the stove unattended when cooking, monitor wood burning fireplaces and burning candles, have smokers smoke outside the home and make sure cigarette butts are extinguished, teach kids not to play with matches/lighters and make sure to keep them out of children's reach, don't overload electrical circuits and replace old, faulty wiring.

While most participants felt fire safe in their own homes, some indicated that they didn't know how safe their neighbor's homes were. Those who live in multiple dwelling units felt they could keep their own places safe, but, worried about people who lived in other apartments in their building-be they two or three family homes or larger apartment buildings. There was the feeling that they could still experience a fire in their home because *"I don't know what my neighbor is up to, if their home goes up, mine goes up"*, or simply because *"anything can happen"*.

Some of the participants who were tenants in multiple dwelling units felt that they did not have control over what the landlord did as far as the upkeep of electrical systems, furnaces and storage.

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Participants' Current Awareness of Fire Safety

No one admitted to being without a smoke detector with the exception of one student participant who was cavalier about fire safety. He felt he didn't need smoke detectors in his home because he followed other fire precautions. When one participant mentioned to the student that he was breaking the law, he replied that he wasn't because it was a private residence. Except for this one person, most participants gave the impression that they were aware of the seriousness of fires and the need to have working smoke detectors in the home.

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Example of Fatal Fire in Ward 1

A newspaper article from the Hamilton Spectator, regarding a fatal fire that occurred in Ward 1 with 5 fatalities, was read aloud to each group (see 'Charges Laid in Deadly Fire', Appendix). The fire was touched off by careless smoking. The home had no smoke alarms. The owner of the home was charged with failing to install and maintain smoke alarms. The owner's son, his girlfriend, and her three children lived in the home, a man rented one of the rooms and an overnight guest was in the house at the time of the fire.

With the exception of a few students, all respondents had heard of the fire and said it had an impact on the City of Hamilton. Most respondents were visibly upset by the reminder. Especially affected were people who said they actually knew the people who were in the fire, or, who lived in close proximity to the fire.

Everyone felt that the deaths could have been prevented if there had been working smoke alarms in the home. While most initially felt it was the home owner's fault, with more discussion, respondents concluded that the people living in the home should also be held responsible – they should have made sure there were working smoke alarms in the home they were living in. *"We are responsible for our own safety". "We have to make sure our children are safe"*.

Because of the university and colleges located in the City of Hamilton, many local residential homes have been turned into student rental homes. Some respondents indicated concern when they said that the landlords of some of these homes are careless when it comes to fire safety. *"Many people buy houses, quickly fix them up and rent them out to too many students. They don't fix them properly and they overcrowd them"*.

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How do home fires start?

Respondents gave many examples of how home fires might start: careless smoking, burning candles, an unattended stove, wood burning fireplaces, overloaded electrical circuits, old faulty wiring, children playing with matches and leaving flammables near the furnace.

How can home fires be prevented?

Generally, respondents said that through practicing fire safety rules such as: being responsible by smoking outside and making sure cigarette butts are extinguished, not leaving burning candles, fireplaces or cooking unattended. As well, taking the time to make sure the home is free from clutter that could ignite. In older homes have wiring inspected to ensure it isn't faulty. The most often mentioned ideas for fire safety were smoke detectors and a fire safety escape plan. "Responsibility" and "diligence" were words that kept coming up when it came to taking fire safety and prevention to heart.

Respondents were fairly knowledgeable when it came to smoke detectors. The majority knew you could push a button to test that your smoke alarm was working. Some were aware that there were battery operated and electric smoke detectors. They knew that the batteries had to be changed, *"I change the batteries with the time change"*, *"There are reminders on the TV and radio when it's time to change the batteries"*, *"I change them every six months"*. Some renters checked their smoke alarms; others said their landlords took care of it. A few people said they vacuumed/ dusted their smoke detectors regularly. Several respondents mentioned that you need a smoke alarm on every floor, ideally near sleeping areas. Home owners knew that a fine could be charged if there were no working smoke detectors in your home. Several respondents admitted to disarming the alarm if it became a nuisance while cooking.

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How can home fires be prevented? cont'd

Having a fire escape plan was another method of fire safety mentioned in the groups. Generally, several respondents, especially those with children, said that they had a fire escape plan. Also, those living in apartments and condos said they had regular fire alarm practices. Those who had escape plans knew that when there is a fire in the home you need to get out immediately, using one of two possible exits, that there must be a designated meeting place outside the home for household members and that the fire department isn't called until after you get out of the house.

Are some more knowledgeable about fire safety than others?

These focus groups were made up of men and women with a range of ages – college student age to seniors, there was a range of income levels –mostly low income earners (less the \$45,000) with some high income earners (\$80,000 or more), there were home owners and renters, there were new immigrants and people who had lived in Hamilton their entire life. At least one person in each group seemed like an “expert” when it came to fire safety. They gave more details about fire safety such as what type of wiring should be in a home or to keep hazardous materials away from heat. These “experts” tended to be tradesmen who knew about wiring and home construction or were people who had learned about fire safety in the workplace. Some people mentioned that their employers offer training in fire safety i.e. hospitals and factories.

Generally, seniors in the groups knew more about fire safety than youths. Perhaps this was due to older respondents just having more experience with fire and fire prevention, or, having more time on their hands to learn about fire safety. There was some discussion about young people not taking life too seriously, *“they feel invincible”, “I’m young and I don’t think about fires much”*.

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Are some more knowledgeable about fire safety than others? cont'd

Respondents who were in the low income bracket knew quite a bit about fire safety and prevention. This may be due in part to the following factors which they mentioned during the group sessions. Most of those at the lower income level had experienced a fire themselves or had someone close to them who had. Because of their close encounters with fire they were made more aware of the consequences. When asked, very few of those in the higher income levels had experienced an actual fire. There were more smokers in the lower income levels than those making higher incomes. Many of those who smoke said they would go outside the home to smoke, as a fire precaution. Many of the homes/apartments that the lower income respondents live in are older and in some cases, run-down. These people spoke of frustrations in dealing with landlords who don't keep their rental units fire safe. It seems that lower income earners have more reason to keep fires and fire safety top of mind.

Those with children at home were also fire savvy. These respondents feel responsible for keeping their children safe. They mentioned that they had talked to their kids about fire safety, had practiced a fire escape plan and had made sure their kids don't play with matches and lighters, by keeping them out of reach. Respondents who had children said their kids bring home fire safety lessons they have learned at school which acts as a reinforcement for the adults.

Where have you learned about fire safety?

Respondents mentioned that they had learned about fire safety as children at school, at work, at the fire station (open house), at local festivals, at a kiosk in the local mall, on TV, on the radio, in the newspaper, from real estate agents, from insurance companies, at the hospital, at a seniors' residence, posted in apartment buildings and at Girl Guides and Scouts meetings.

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Who has communicated the fire safety messages to you?

The most commonly mentioned communicators of fire safety are the firefighters. Respondents felt that firefighters are the experts when it comes to fire related information and they appreciate hearing fire safety messages from them. Some other communicators of fire safety are teachers, parents, youth leaders (Scouts, Girl Guides), co-workers who have been assigned or volunteer to do fire safety training at work, and Smokey the Bear – although a few people mentioned they hadn't seen Smokey in fire prevention ads for a long time, everyone knew of him.

Has fire safety information affected you?

All respondents in the group had some knowledge of fire safety. It seems that fire messages communicated in childhood are remembered throughout life, "I am on autopilot, I don't consciously think of (fire safety) all the time, I just do things I remember from childhood". As well, these groups showed that with more life experiences such as getting a job, getting married, having children and buying a home, the knowledge base for fire safety expands with the added responsibilities.

Do you know enough about fire safety?

Most respondents seemed to feel confident in the amount of fire safety information they had. The students in these groups felt they knew enough, although, when probed, some of them didn't know the details about even the basics like smoke detectors and fire escape plans. This could be due in part to the fact that they are just starting out on their own and becoming solely responsible for their well being. Adults with homes or families seemed to have more specific knowledge about the various aspects of fire prevention and safety. One woman with a home and family indicated that *"really, there's not a lot to know about fire safety, once you learn what there is, there's nothing new."*

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What do you think is the best way to communicate fire prevention and safety i.e. Who and Where?

The most frequent response to *who* should communicate fire safety information again was “firefighters”. They were described as “experts” and “authorities” when it comes to fire safety. Several respondents mentioned that fire victims would make good communicators *“they could tell of real life tragedies, people would listen more”*. A few people mentioned Smokey the Bear as a good communicator of fire protection. He is readily recognizable and his messages have stuck with respondents over the years.

The following are places *where* respondents felt that fire messages would best be communicated: When it comes to kids, schools are still a good place to communicate fire messages, *“My son came home and said we needed a fire escape plan, so we put one in place”*. *“Kids remember what they’re taught and they remember it forever.”* One respondent thought it would be a good idea to train some students to become fire safety monitors at school. Along with Girl Guides and Scouts, one person mentioned that community summer camps would be a good place to teach kids about fire safety. *“Camp councilors could teach them”*. As well, *“Fire safety ads on children’s TV shows would be good”*.

A few of the students, but not all, mentioned that their college hands out information about how to find a safe student rental i.e. what to look for, when renting off campus. Other students who lived in apartment buildings mentioned that a fire escape plan was posted on the back of their apartment door.

A few respondents mentioned that Facebook would be a good place to get fire safety and prevention messages out. One student indicated *“Everyone is using Facebook these days. They could place an ad or a quick survey there.”*

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What do you think is the best way to communicate fire prevention and safety i.e. Who and Where? con't

One respondent said that when young people are learning to drive, they have to see movies about drunk driving and the consequences. *“Why not show students a video about the consequences of fire?”*

One man who had recently had a baby said that fire safety should start in the hospital when you have a new baby. *“You have to learn about diapers and breast feeding, why not fire prevention?”*

Although a few people were aware that the City of Hamilton website has information about Emergency Services – Fire, most did not know that there was fire prevention and safety information available. Respondents felt the website address, or any fire safety message for that matter, would be noticed as an ad in the local paper, on billboards, on TV and radio or on the side of a bus.

A senior citizen in one of the groups became annoyed when it was suggested that respondents go to a website for information. *“I shouldn't be going to them (the fire department) for information; they should be coming to me!”* Some seniors don't use computers and some have difficulty getting around because they don't drive anymore and in some cases, their physical mobility is limited. Seniors in the groups mentioned that firefighters had come to seniors' community centers and seniors' residences to talk about fire safety. *“At the seniors' residence, the firefighters taught each person what to do if there is a fire in their building.”* The seniors enjoy this and the firefighters have an attentive audience, after all, as one respondent put it *“We're not that busy and we like having things to do.”* One of the seniors said that they had learned the Fire Prevention messages from the *Remembering When*™: a Fire and Fall Prevention Program for Older Adults playing cards.

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What do you think is the best way to communicate fire prevention and safety i.e. Who and Where? con't

Many of the respondents at the lower income level (especially Wards 2 & 3) did not have a car and were limited to public transportation. Probably because of this limitation, they recommended that fire safety information be available at community gatherings or places within walking distance such as the local fire station or community center. One respondent suggested that fire safety information be available at some local building i.e. *"...like a storefront, where people could go and visit and get information or free smoke alarms."* Another respondent said that firefighters had come to their neighbourhood with the fire truck and were there to provide fire safety information. Respondents in Wards 2 & 3 liked the idea of having fire safety information available within walking distance.

Many of the respondents in these groups listen to the radio while in their cars or when at home. They felt that the radio would be a good place to make public service announcements and provide other information on fire safety.

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How do you feel about people in uniform, such as firefighters?

Among all groups, respondents held firefighters in high regard. Respondents recognized firefighters as *“an exceptional breed of people”, “I admire them.”, “I wouldn’t think twice about trusting them in a disaster.”, “They know how to do their job.”, “I feel confident around them.”, “They have lots of training and know CPR.”, “They are always first on the scene of an emergency.”, “They care about people.”, “Kids love them, they look up to them.”, “My kids loved it when firemen came to our house to check the smoke alarms.”*

The City of Hamilton Fire Services offers a Smoke Alarm Installation program where firefighters will come to your home and provide and install the required number of smoke alarms and batteries free of charge. They also offer a Fire Inspection Program where they will come to your home, free of charge, and address all of your home safety concerns. When asked how they would feel about firefighters coming into their home for the Smoke Alarm or Fire Inspection Programs that the City of Hamilton Fire Services offers, many respondents said they would welcome the firefighters into their home, they were receptive to the idea. However, a few people had some reservations about firefighters coming into their homes. *“There is a bit of fear they are going to come into my home and fine me if I have something wrong.”* and *“No one wants to be fined and have a huge bill.”* and *“It would have to be done on a voluntary basis.”* One respondent said *“If people don’t want (the firefighters in their home) then they are guilty or have something they don’t want to be found.”* Another respondent felt *“The problem is the people who don’t have (working smoke alarms) won’t volunteer to have firefighters in their home.”*

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How do you feel about people in uniform, such as firefighters? con't

A few people in the groups said if it was on a voluntary basis, the Fire Department could advertise that they were coming to a certain neighbourhood and people living in that neighbourhood could book appointments to have the firefighters come to their homes. At least this way, people would become aware of the Programs if they didn't already know, and take advantage of them if they would like to.

One respondent suggested the firefighters go door to door to check for smoke alarms, however, others responded that this would be a waste of the firefighters' time if people were not home, or, if it wasn't a convenient time for the resident.

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Fire safety responsibility

Most respondents said that they felt safe from home fires. They also indicated that it was their own responsibility to make sure their home was safe. Only a few students put the onus for fire safety on their landlords *“My landlord takes care of fire safety in my building.”* All respondents that lived in rental units knew that their landlords were responsible for installing smoke alarms. While some of those living in rental housing checked the smoke alarms themselves, others left it up to the landlord. Most of the respondents living in rental units said they were aware of their rights as tenants, as they pertain to fire safety. One respondent, who didn't have any smoke alarms in his house, believed that since he lived in a *private residence*, he didn't need to install smoke alarms if he didn't want to.

Motivating people to change

During these focus groups, there were several reasons that respondents gave as to why people might not follow fire prevention and safety rules. *“We are lazy.”*, *“There's the belief 'it won't happen to me'.”*, *“Young people think they're invincible.”*, *“People just forget.”*, *“It's just not something I think about unless there's an emergency.”* With the rise in fatal fires in Hamilton, Fire Services would like to motivate its citizens to make fire prevention and safety a higher priority in their lives.

Respondents in these groups were asked what experiences had motivated them to make a change in their life. Some of the motivators described were: *“Fear”*, *“I got married, now I have a wife and a child is on the way.”*, *“Becoming a home owner made me become more responsible.”*, *“Visual impact is a motivator –*

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Motivating people to change cont'd

when you see something bad happen to someone else, you try to prevent it from happening to you.”, *“When I had kids my priorities changed.*”, *“An old friend told me that I looked fat and I felt so bad I took off 15 pounds and I haven’t gained it back.*”, *“My mother developed osteoporosis, so, now that I’m older, I get monitored for it.*”, *“When my husband died, I felt life was short so I went out and achieved some personal goals.”* Generally, it appears that it takes something drastic to motivate people to change, an event that alters their life in some way, or something that “shocks” them into changing their behavior. Participants felt that people learned from their own experiences and from the experiences of others when it came to health related issues.

When asked what might motivate them or others to pay more attention to fire prevention and fire safety such as installing and maintaining a smoke alarm if you don’t already have one or, making a fire escape plan if they don’t have one, respondents gave the following as examples of what they felt would motivate people to be more diligent. Several respondents said that “shock effect” works, *“There’s a new gory commercial about someone driving and texting. It makes you think.”* *“Re-enact an actual fire for people to watch, something very graphic that will show the viewer what a fire really looks like.”* Another suggestion was to ask burn victims to talk to audiences about their experience in a fire. *“Victim impact statements would force people to think about fire safety.”*

Some respondents mentioned that repetition is a good way to keep people focused on fire safety. One respondent who had immigrated to Hamilton from Ireland said *“When I lived there (in Ireland), they had ‘Smoke Alarm Mondays’. On Mondays, an ad would come on after the news. They had personal stories*

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Motivating people to change cont'd

that got into people's heads and it was a reminder to test your smoke alarm every Monday. These were very effective."

A few respondents said that free pamphlets about fire safety, at homes, door-to-door would act as a reminder. *"Hydro left little bags on every door and everyone got a free fluorescent bulb. Couldn't the fire department do something similar? Everyone likes getting free stuff."* The idea of enticing people with incentives, to come to fire safety events, came up again and again. *"If they have a booth at a festival I'd go in if they had a free giveaway – even a pen!"* *"When I was young I'd go to the fire station because they gave out free Hamilton Ti-Cats football cards with fire safety messages on them."* *"At our seniors' residence, they gave us a free deck of cards for coming to a talk – that was nice."* *"The firefighters could have a community BBQ with free hot dogs and they could give out fire tips."*

Respondents mentioned that they like the idea of interactive fire demonstrations since they're more interesting than just talking. *"At the Peach Festival firefighters had a trailer and they simulated a house fire. They put kids in it and simulated fire and smoke and taught the kids to crawl on the floor and how to get out."*

A few other suggestions for motivating people included bringing a local athlete out for people to meet at the same time as getting some fire safety information. Mix with other events to get a wider audience i.e. home shows or car shows. Build a theme around fire prevention and safety to keep it new and interesting, similar to the 'Keep it Green' programs for the environment.

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'No Time to Spare' Fire Video

At the conclusion of each focus group, respondents were shown the video 'No Time to Spare', a 3 minute video which shows how quickly a fire can spread. After watching the video, respondents were asked for their opinion. "It amazed me to see how fast it went", "It demonstrates that you don't have a lot of time", "This is scary, it would affect people", "After our discussion tonight and seeing this video, I'm going home to speak to my husband about a Fire Escape Plan.", "I'm going to check my smoke alarms when I get home."

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CONCLUSIONS

The results of these focus groups show the challenges associated with effectively communicating fire prevention and safety messages to residents in the high risk fire areas of Hamilton.

Most respondents in these focus groups have demonstrated that they are somewhat knowledgeable when it comes to fire prevention and safety, some more than others. Only one person in all four groups admitted to not having a smoke alarm in their home. The fact of the matter is that there are residents in Hamilton who do not have working smoke alarms in their homes and who do not practice good fire prevention and safety rules. After holding these focus groups with residents in the high risk fire Wards, findings have emerged regarding how best to address reaching people in these areas with fire prevention and safety information.

One of the most important findings in these groups was that residents need to have a reason to pay attention to fire safety messages. The most impactful way to do this is to show them what can happen when home fires take place. An example of this is the 'No Time to Spare' video. This video demonstrated to residents the consequences of a fire and it affected all who watched it in some way. It appears that one of the best ways to motivate people to change their behavior is to "shock" them. Showing residents ads or videos of fire re-enactments, and the consequences associated with them, would force people to think about fire safety. Another effective way of showing the effects of fire would be to ask burn victims to tell their stories in ads on TV or to ask them to talk to an audience.

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CONCLUSIONS

Depending on the stage in life they are at, many people eventually find their own reasons to pay attention to fire safety messages: when they get a job, when they move away from home or when they buy a home, when they have children or when they retire. It is important that fire prevention and safety messages be available to people at each stage in life. Fire Services should encourage avenues of fire prevention and safety communication at all of these life stages by partnering with employers, with colleges and universities, with real estate agents and insurance companies, with new parenting organizations, with seniors groups and homecare groups.

Students, many of whom are renters, need to hear the message that fire prevention and safety is serious business and that they need to become responsible for their own fire safety. Students can be reached in a few different ways. They use computers and the internet frequently. Many use search engines and go on Facebook to gather needed information. These avenues for fire safety messages should be explored not only with internet professionals but also with input from students.

College/University Registration is an ideal forum to distribute fire safety information to new students coming into residence as well as students who are looking for living accommodations off campus. Those living off campus should know their rights as tenants. They should be provided with information about how to check smoke alarms and who to call if their landlords are not up to spec with the smoke alarm(s) in the rental unit.

FIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY IN THE CITY OF HAMILTON A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

CONCLUSIONS

Landlords' failing to install and maintain smoke alarms is a major concern for Hamilton Fire Services. Strong messages about the hefty fines charged, if a fire breaks out in a home without working smoke alarms, should be put on local radio and TV programs for landlords to hear. The low cost of smoke detectors and ease of installation should be mentioned at the same time.

Residents in the low income group (some of who are new immigrants) demonstrated that they were very community oriented. They spoke of community gatherings and the local fire station as good places to learn about fire safety. Fire Services can reach this group by going out to the low income neighbourhoods with fire information. Make it entertaining (interactive) and bring some inexpensive fire related give-aways, provide some food like hot dogs. Interactive demonstrations and free give-aways that relate to fire safety were suggested as ways to draw people in, among all demographics.

Certain Wards in Hamilton are characterized by a rising number of new immigrants. Since it was necessary for participants to be able to converse in English, only immigrants who were able to communicate well in English were recruited. It should be mentioned, however, that for residents who do not speak English well, either firefighters who are bilingual or "messengers" from different cultures should go out to community gatherings and provide fire safety education, in the most commonly used languages.

Seniors also want firefighters to come to them with fire safety information – even though they tend to know a fair amount about fire safety, there was mention that they needed to be reminded about the rules from time to time. Seniors enjoy face to face interaction. They like getting out of their homes and having something to do. Seniors' Community Centres and Seniors' Residences are good places to hold these talks.

FIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY IN THE CITY OF HAMILTON A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

CONCLUSIONS

Most participants were not aware that the City of Hamilton had fire prevention information on their website. Perhaps ads around the city (local radio and TV stations, buses, the local newspaper) could provide fire safety messages along with the Fire Services web address. Again, residents would need a reason to go to the website – to get more information on something that’s important to them, or, maybe to take part in a contest.

Repetitive messages about fire safety are perceived as something positive. For instance, public radio or TV bulletins that remind people to change their smoke alarm batteries every six months or, messages to check their smoke alarms every Monday, could be used. When they hear it often, it becomes second nature.

There was limited knowledge about the free Smoke Alarm Installation and Fire Inspection Programs, both currently offered by Hamilton Fire Services. Most people showed interest in these programs and wanted to know more. Fire Services could put a push on these programs by providing information through advertising (local radio, TV, newspapers, the local mall, community centers). In order for residents to take positive action towards the programs, the ads would need to assure residents that the programs would be done in a non-threatening manner i.e. no fines would be charged if you currently don’t have a working smoke alarm. Fire Services could advertise a number to call, or, could go to community events and advertise the programs.

Without a doubt, the best communicators of fire safety information are firefighters who are seen as the trusted “experts”. People want to hear about fire information from those who know the most. There is also a fondness for Smokey the Bear who hasn’t been seen in some time – consider some new advertising for fire prevention and safety with an updated Smokey.

APPENDIX

**FIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY IN THE CITY OF HAMILTON
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

MODERATOR'S GUIDE

1. GROUP WARM-UP WITH PARTICIPANTS – Purpose and Introduction
(5 minutes)

Explain purpose of session to respondents:

- This evening we'll be discussing topics relating to fire prevention and safety.
- Logistics: taping, people watching, speak loudly so everyone can hear, differing opinions, want to hear from everyone.

Introduction

- First name
- Number of years in Hamilton
- Family composition

1. GENERAL ATTITUDES (20 minutes)

- When I say "Fire Prevention".....what do you think of?
- When it comes to fire safety in the home, how can someone make sure they feel safe from fires in their home?
- Do you feel safe against fires in your home? Why or why not?

(Read article aloud about a Hamilton home fire to the group)

- Do you remember hearing about this fire? (Show of hands)
- Did learning of this incident affect you in any way? / Make you change anything related to fire safety?
- What do you think about this?
- Could it have been prevented? How?

2. SPECIFIC TOPICS

A. Fire Safety Knowledge (30 minutes) – use flipchart

- Give me some reasons that there might be a fire in a home (write on flipchart) Probe for: smoking, alcohol, cooking
- Tell me ways that you can make sure you are safe when it comes to home fires (make list).
- Talk about points on list. If any of the following don't come up on the list, mention them and see how much respondents know about them....

Smoke Alarms – Tell me what you know about smoke alarms. Probe for:

- Why are they important?
- Types of household smoke alarms
- Where should they be located?
- How many?
- Maintenance?
- Why would a smoke alarm not work?
- Smoke alarm features i.e. battery indicator, optional hush/silence feature, indicator light to show ac power is being supplied to wired smoke alarms?
- Renters – who is responsible for them?
- What if you don't have smoke alarms in your home – consequences?

Fire Escape Plan – Probe for:

- What do you do if there is a fire? (Single and multiple dwellings)
- Escape Plan, practice your escape...have you discussed with family?
- Stop, drop and roll, crawl low under smoke

[Keep in mind demographics: students, seniors, immigrants, single/multiple dwelling residents and look for trends their fire safety knowledge i.e. are some more aware than others?]

2. SPECIFIC TOPICS

B. Communication of Fire Safety (20 minutes) – use flipchart

- Tell me where you have heard about fire safety. What methods have been used? Probe: Hamilton Emergency Services, community events, mall displays, school, brochures, newspapers, TV, radio, internet news, e-mail messages (write on flipchart)
- When a person has communicated fire safety, who is this person? Probe: firefighter, teacher, community leader, child, parent, etc.
- Has the fire safety information affected you at all? Why or why not? Probe: should it be more tailored for your specific needs, i.e. to immigrants, students, seniors, renters?
- Do you feel you know enough about fire safety? Why or why not?
- How do you think fire prevention and safety information would be best communicated to you? Who? i.e. peers, parents, mentors? Who would influence you? Where/when would you like to hear about fire safety?
- How do you feel about people in uniform? What do you think about firefighters? Have you ever met anyone from the Hamilton Emergency Services-Fire?
- Some cities have smoke alarm installation programs where firefighters install free alarms in the homes of its citizens. How would you feel about firefighters coming to your home to install smoke alarms and to share safety information? What day and time would be best for such a visit?

C. Fire Safety Responsibility (10 minutes)

- Would you say that you feel safe from home fires? Why or why not?
- Whose responsibility is fire safety and prevention in the home?
- Probe: Awareness of law enforcement component of fire i.e. do they know there is a law regarding home fires, zero tolerance – need to be working smoke alarms. What non conformance consequences exist?
- Renters-do you know your rights as tenants?

2. SPECIFIC TOPICS

D. Motivating People to Change (20 minutes)

I want you to take a few minutes to think about a situation in your life where you had to make a change, a life altering change.....and I want you to think about what motivated you to make that change. Was it because of a message or program you received?

Give example.....

For instance, you might notice that your good friend over the course of a few months loses 10 pounds, and it's noticeable. When you ask them why they're losing weight, they tell you that the doctor told them they had high blood sugar and if they didn't lose weight they might become diabetic, so they decided to lose weight. In this case, the risk of becoming diabetic motivated them.

- Give me some examples of what has motivated you to make a change in your life.

Read the following statement:

“Over a recent 3 year period, an analysis was undertaken of people that died in homes where smoke alarms were present, but did not work. 85% of those victims did not have a functioning smoke alarm because of a dead or missing battery/power source.” *(From Fire Safety Council website)*

- Why do you think so many people have smoke alarms in their homes that don't work properly?
- What might motivate people to change their behavior when it comes to smoke alarms?
- What would motivate people to be more concerned about fire prevention and safety?

E. Fire Video (10 minutes)

I'm going to show you a 3 minute clip on the screen about a fire and then, I'll ask for your opinion, once it's finished.

- What did you think when you were watching that video?
- Is there anything else you'd like to say before we finish?

CLOSE

CHARGES LAID IN DEADLY FIRE

The owner of a west Hamilton home, where five people died in a catastrophic fire, has been charged with failing to install and maintain smoke alarms in the home. Hamilton Emergency Services said yesterday it laid two charges against the homeowner of 129 Broadway Ave.

Seven people were inside the two-storey rental home early on March 1, 2008 when one of Hamilton's deadliest fires broke out. Investigators said careless smoking touched off the blaze.

Twenty-two year old Melissa Den Hollander and her three daughters, Emma, 4, Ella 2, and Alana 1, all perished. So did 19-year old Josh Lukas, who rented a room in the home. Den Hollander's boyfriend, Richard Griffin, managed to get out of the home and tried unsuccessfully to rescue the children. Another woman staying in the home that night also escaped.

Ontario Fire Marshal investigators concluded the home had no working smoke alarms in it.

The home was owned by Nicolas John Griffin, a prominent McMaster University professor.

Family of the fire victims say they are relieved charges have been brought against the homeowner. "I'm glad something's being done" said Tina Grant, the mother of 19-year old Josh Lukas who died in the fire. "That house was in the University district, and how many kids move into that neighbourhood every year?" "If you are going to own a home in that district and take thousands of dollars a year in rent, then you need to maintain a safety standard so that parents don't need to worry when their kids are at university." Grant said that nothing can replace her son. "The bottom line is that we have to change things so that it doesn't happen to another family."