



# ***CHIEF'S FILE CABINET***

***Ronny J. Coleman***

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## Technology and Fire Prevention

Have you ever thought about how much of an impact the invention of the telephone has had on the delivery of fire services? Do we ever give credit to Alexander Graham Bell for his contribution to the delivery of modern fire protection?

Before the discovery of electricity, the only way anyone had of reporting fires was through such things as town criers. Later, with the invention of telegraph systems, there was the evolution of the telegraph fire alarm systems. When the telephone first became popular, there were not a lot of them around. They were the first electronic device that was able to give the fire department specific information on what kind of an emergency the department was going to face when it rolled to the scene.

Well, a lot of water has gone under the bridge (or out of the end of fire streams) since the invention of the telephone. We've seen telephone alarm systems installed; the 911 system has now started to spread across the United States, and in recent years we've even seen the use of digital alarm equipment which transmits information over telephone circuits to fire alarm receiving centers.

We've been using the telephone to receive alarms, and yet, the telephone has not been utilized as a tool to give out information with a great deal of success. What I am talking about is the use of the telephone as a public education device for a fire department.

During the last fire prevention week, the officers and the members of San Clemente Fire Department decided to try a new and better way to reach a diverse segment of our community with fire prevention education messages. We all know that in any public education program, it is extremely important to hit upon all the elements of society. If you set up a program for children, you basically only get to the children.

If you set up a program through the men's clubs, basically you only get to the men's clubs. It seems like most of these public education programs have a limit to the numbers and range of individuals that you can impact in a short period of time.

Someone suggested that we take a page out of the politician's book. How about a telephone poll? Most everyone has received a phone call at least once in their life where someone asked you a few simple questions to help complete a survey for a political campaign, advertising campaign or provide input to someone trying to analyze how people felt on a given subject.

Firefighter Tim Wright, who is the Public Education Officer for our department, was responsible for the fire prevention activities during the fire prevention week in October of 1980. Fireman Wright in concert



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with other staff members in the department sat down and devised a list of fire prevention measures that we would like to survey in our community. These were converted to questions that were reproduced in the illustration of the Form used during our telephone survey. The project was labeled Fire Stop-B. This was an acronym derived from firefighters involved in residentially engineered systems technology organized to provide benefits.

A group of ladies, the San Clemente Junior Women's Club, was asked if they would like to cooperate in the conducting of this telephone survey poll during fire prevention week. Their Public Safety Chairman agreed that it would be an excellent public service project for the community. Arrangements were made for several of the girls to come to headquarters fire station during the middle of the week's activities.

Under the direction of Fireman Wright, six of the women utilized a crisscross telephone directory to make random samplings of all of the neighborhoods in the city. This crisscross telephone directory was arranged so that we could cross-reference telephone numbers with addresses and addresses with telephone numbers. An attempt was made to take a random sample of all of the types of homes represented in the community.

Basically, San Clemente is a beach oriented residential community. There is a range of homes from apartment houses to million dollar residences. Working carefully with the telephone directory, the project team attempted to get a percentage of telephone contacts out of each and every neighborhood to representing the complete range of types of homes.

Results of the telephone survey were most gratifying. The women reported that only one out of every eight persons answering the telephone refused to answer the questions that were requested. Many of the women, while engaged in conversation with the individuals, found that the persons were asking more questions back than they were answering.

Over a period of about four hours, the six women were able to contact in excess of several hundred homes. The results of this survey indicated that most of the fire prevention programs that we had engaged in the community had impacted at least fifty percent of the homes. This was reflected by the fact that at least 50% of the homes had smoke detectors, 50% had telephone stickers directly on their telephones, 50% of the homes were aware of our Vial of Life Program, etc., etc.

After the survey was completed, the telephone numbers were cross-referenced against addresses. Those individuals who responded to the questionnaire with a negative response were given a follow-up letter. This letter had additional information on the area they indicated a negative answer. For example, if the person said they did not have a telephone sticker on their telephone and they didn't know the emergency telephone number, then they were sent a sticker. If the individual indicated they didn't know about home exit drills or they weren't aware of smoke detector technology, etc., then they were given a



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package of that information. In some cases, the individuals received one of everything. In other cases, they only received a minimum amount of information.

As a result of this survey, we estimate we contacted or touched over 550 people in the community. This was accomplished in a period of approximately four hours. This was far more cost effective as far as utilization of manpower than many of the public education programs where we have to go out door-to-door using up gasoline and diesel for our fire trucks and wear and tear on our fire apparatus.

This doesn't mean that these kinds of programs will meet other public education needs. Our department engages in many other public relations types of activities that require our actual participation out in the community. We still maintain an active inspection program and are attempting to make as many contacts through them as it is possible.

The use of the telephone survey was extremely productive for evaluating the effect of these programs. I'm sure many of us have had the sinking sensation of watching someone collect fire prevention literature off of a table or a demonstration and walk over and toss it in the back seat of their car or carelessly discard it into a trash basket as they leave the area. The Fire Stop-B Telephone Survey tested the system to see if information gets to where it is supposed to get, into the home.

An interesting sidelight of this program was that the Junior Women's Club was eminently successful in getting people to talk about the issues on the questionnaire. Many of the women were of the age where they have children of their own and could discuss such things as how to conduct a exit drill, how to teach a young child to use the telephone for emergency purposes and so forth.

All of those who responded to the questionnaire were given an invitation at the end of the discussion to attend an open house at the San Clemente Fire Department on Saturday morning to end fire prevention week. At that open house, all participants were invited to pick up a decal that exemplified the Fire Stop B project. Well over 700 people participated in the open house the following Saturday morning.

We feel that the telephone survey was an extremely useful part of the public education program for our department. It tested the system where we are least successful in most fire prevention campaigns. It got us into the home. Granted, we weren't able to conduct an inspection of the facilities. Generally speaking, most fire departments are not eminently successful in getting that accomplished anyway.

What it did do was to open up the channel of communication between our department and the citizens that we serve. As an offshoot of Fire Stop-B, several people have come around the department asking for additional information based on the questionnaire. Several of the elderly people we have contacted through the telephone survey have been added to the YANA check (You Are Not Alone) program.



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Of course, a telephone cannot eliminate a fire hazard. A person on the other end of the line can always tell you one thing and then go do something else because they don't have to face you eye to eye on fire prevention. Nonetheless, we found the telephone to be a useful tool in the spreading of the word in fire prevention. The next time that you are thinking about a public education program, remember what the telephone company has been telling us for years. "Let your fingers do the walking."



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## SAMPLE SURVEY

Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_ with the San Clemente Jr. Women's Club. I'm calling you today on behalf of the San Clemente Fire Department. If it would be all right with you, I have approximately 7 questions I would like to ask:

1.	How long have you lived in San Clemente?	_____ Years
2.	Do you have a smoke detector?	_____ Yes _____ No
3.	Do you have the Fire Department phone number on your phone?	_____ Yes _____ No
a.	Could you tell me what the number is?	_____ Yes _____ No
b.	Is this number on your telephone?	_____ Yes _____ No
4.	Have you ever used the services of our Fire Department?	_____ Yes _____ No
	What type?	_____ Medical Aid _____ Fire _____ Other
5.	Do you have children?	_____ Yes _____ No
a.	How many?	_____
b.	Have you practiced a home exit fire drill?	_____ Yes _____ No
6.	Do you own a fire extinguisher?	_____ Yes _____ No
7.	Have you heard of the "Vial of Life" program?	_____ Yes _____ No

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'd like to take this time to invite you to listen to K-WAVE 108 FM @ 7:00 p.m. Friday for the "Great Sam Clemente Fire Drill." You are also invited to or Open House this Saturday October 11. Stop by and pick up your free 'Stop Fire' Sticker!