



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

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Happening in the Hood

A slang expression for a place where people live is called “the hood”. The expression is a variation of a simple concept. As we divide our communities into different segments and elements there is a concept called a neighbor-hood. Generally speaking a neighborhood consists of a relatively homogenous collection of human beings and habitats that create a sense of belonging. In some cases a neighborhood is created by the development process – usually with the term “oaks” in the title. Or, the neighborhood comes about from ethnicity and economics.

We in the fire service are witnesses to the impact of neighborhoods even if it is in a roundabout way. For example, many communities are divided into neighborhoods that are so much in contrast with one another that they might be considered opposites. There are certain neighborhoods that you have in your town in which you get very few events, right? And, there are certain neighborhoods in which you get a large number of events. And, moreover, you may find that these neighborhoods even have specific typification that relates to the type of events that occur in those neighborhoods, right?

From a fire protection planning point of view, neighborhoods then are really a part of the make-up of our risk management model. This column is going to suggest that one of the things you might want to be thinking about doing is to identify those neighborhoods in a specific fashion as part of your risk evaluation process.

The US Census Bureau has done us one better. They go into these neighborhoods and define very specific data that describes what makes a neighborhood function the way it does. An example of this can be found in a document called “Community Tapestry”. The old edition of this document is rapidly going out of style right now, because it is based on ten year old data. But we are now in the year of another census. In the very near future, there will be information made available to the public about neighborhoods and census tracts that we should be looking to for clues as to what is going to happen to our profession.

If your department hasn't already done so, now is the time to become familiar with the US Census Bureau. If you go to the US Census Bureau website you will find a host of tabs that might allow you to mine information that will be useful in your discussion about both workload and projected consequences on the department.

Armed with the information from census tract you can be more specific about what you anticipate are going to be activities for your organization. I am not suggesting we have reached the level of scientific validity but you can start projecting exactly the number of EMS calls that are going to occur and when. But, the demographic information contained in the census tract is useful in targeting your activities and especially your education efforts.



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Do you have a neighborhood in which language can actually be a barrier? If you have one, then plans should be made to translate educational materials into that language. Sometimes you have to have multiple languages

What about income? Is it true that areas in which there are lower income families are more often the users of specific types of services? The better that you can paint the portrait of your community with this information the more likely you will have programs to mitigate them.

Originally fire stations were looked upon as neighborhood assets. If we go back and look at the early days of fire station distribution it was not uncommon for fire stations to have ethnic and financial implications. In many cases today the fire station has become transparent to the neighborhood. More dangerous is the idea that the neighborhood has become transparent to the fire station. Any effort that you can engage as the fire official in understanding your neighborhoods demographics should be translatable into good will and a sense of belonging that is in the best interest of the fire service.

Of course we don't want to see firefighters exchanging gang signs to be "in" in specific neighborhoods but we need to be the community expert on what is happening in your hood. There is an old saying that forewarned is forearmed. Finding the facts out of the US Census Bureau and using that information as part of your overall fire prevention and public education strategy is not a mistake.