

**BEGINNING HOME SAFETY EDUCATION TO SENIOR CITIZENS IN  
LENEXA, KANSAS**

LEADING COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION

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## Abstract

The problem was that the Lenexa Fire Department was lacking a viable home safety program for senior citizens, which continues to have the potential to lead to injury, and/or death within the senior citizen population. The purpose of this study was to develop a home safety program targeted to educate senior citizens regarding home safety. This was an action research project. The research questions were:

1. What types of home safety programs for senior citizens home currently exist within Johnson County, Kansas?
2. How time frame would be needed to provide the program to area senior citizens?
3. What would be the most effective way to reach senior citizens residing in Lenexa, Kansas to provide a program on home safety?

The procedures involved collecting and evaluating 12 safety programs dealing with senior citizens and working to determining the most effective method of getting the program out to the senior citizens of the community.

The results were that a home safety program directed towards educating senior citizens was developed.

The recommendation, based on the study conducted, was for the Lenexa Fire Department to implement the developed home safety program for senior citizens. Future readers were advised to use the research provided as a starting point to determine their public education needs of the senior citizens in the community in which they serve.

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## Introduction

The problem is the Lenexa Fire Department is lacking a home safety program for senior citizens, which has the potential to lead to injury, and/or death within our senior citizen population. The purpose of this study is to develop a home safety program targeted to educate senior citizens. This is an action research project.

The research questions are:

1. What types of home safety programs related to senior citizens currently exist within Johnson County, Kansas?
2. What time frame would be needed to provide the program to area senior citizens?
3. What would be the most effective way to reach the senior citizens in Lenexa, Kansas to provide a program on home safety?

## Background and Significance

At the present time, a prevention program targeted to educate senior citizens concerning home safety does not exist within the Lenexa Fire Department. “People over the age of 65 are the fastest growing segment of the American population” (USFA, 1999, p.3). Since 1997, the Lenexa Fire Department has delivered public education programs to over 55,000 people. Each year the fire department visits all 8 elementary schools, providing custom programs for each grade level K-5. Registered daycares are also provided with programs. CPR and first aid instruction is provided to citizens groups, lifeguards, City employees, and the general business community. Hands on fire extinguisher programs are delivered to businesses upon request. Total contacts are over 11,000 people per year.

The City of Lenexa consists of 48 square miles and contains a population of 43,000 residents. Lenexa currently has a large commercial and retail base that brings an influx of over 100,000 additional people on a daily basis. Within Lenexa are five retirement communities with a current population of 1,300 residents.

This study is important to the Lenexa Fire Department for two reasons. First, it will help identify the type of message needed to improve the home safety situation of senior citizens within Lenexa, Kansas. Second, this information will be used to develop and deliver a home safety program for the senior citizens residing in Lenexa, Kansas.

This Applied Research Project (ARP) relates to the unit on Intervention Strategies contained in the Leading Community Risk Reduction (LCRR) Program (USFA 2003).

This research projects relates to United States Fire Administration operational objectives “reduce the loss of life from fire in the age group 65 years old and above” and “to promote within communities a comprehensive, multi-hazard risk reduction plan led by the fire service organization” (NFA, 2002, p. II-2). Historical data shows that unintentional injuries take the lives of approximately 30,000 elderly each year.

### Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to evaluate information received in order to determine the type of program needed for the senior citizens of Lenexa. Three central questions need to be addressed. First, what types of home safety programs related to senior citizens are currently in use within Johnson County, Kansas? Second, what time frame would be needed to provide the program to area senior citizens? Finally, what would be the most effective way to reach senior citizens in Lenexa, Kansas to provide a program on home safety?

In addressing the first question regarding the types of home safety programs related to senior citizens home fire safety currently in use in Johnson County, Kansas, two were found. The Olathe Fire Department has a program that targets only senior citizens that currently live in a retirement community, not in privately owned residences (Operations Chief, personal communications, October 9, 2004). The Overland Park Fire Department has a basic program designed to teach seniors what do in case of an emergency (Department secretary, personal communications, October 9, 2003). The Gardner Department of Public Safety will deliver an impromptu safety talk to senior citizens upon request, which occurs about twice per year. No formal program exist (Fire Commander, personal communications, September 15, 2004).

Due to the low number of programs available in Johnson County, Kansas, research was expanded to include other resource material from various organizations within the United States. Organizations were selected on the basis of similar population to Lenexa, Kansas and organizations that deal with senior citizens.

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) material contained information on smoke detectors and general safety. According to AARP “Every year in the United States, residential fires kill approximately 5,000 people and injure more than 40,000” (AARP, Webplace, 2003). In reviewing material from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) a home safety checklist pointed out “each year, more than 734,000 people over 65 are treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries obtained in the home” (AAOS, Home Safety Checklist, 2000). It was found that most material reviewed covered a checklist for the senior citizens to use. “Residents capable of

self-preservation can be trained to recognize fire hazards and practice fire prevention methods” (NFPA, 1996, p. 14-1).

Next, literature for the second research question, “What time frame would be needed to provide the program to area senior citizens?” was addressed. Based on a review of 12 public education programs dealing with home fire safety for senior citizens (AARP, AAOS, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, National Research Council Canada, The Elder Care Team, Township of West Milford, NJ, Tempe Fire Department, AZ, Springfield Fire and Life Safety, OR, [www.azaz.essortment.com](http://www.azaz.essortment.com), Island County Fire District 2, City and County of Honolulu, Lexington Fire Department, MA, Borough of Wharton Fire Department) the average time needed to provide an effective fire prevention program was determined to be 30 minutes.

As a final point, question three asks, “What would be the most effective way to reach senior citizens residing in Lenexa, Kansas to provide a program on home safety?” Several of the programs that were reviewed had placed information concerning the availability of their programs on their departmental web site. This would require knowledge of web publishing techniques or the availability of an Information Systems technician on staff.

The City of Lenexa publishes a quarterly newsletter for senior citizens and it is distributed to the retirement communities and is handed out at the Lenexa Senior Center. Lunch is served at the Senior Center daily and programs are set up to be delivered prior to and/or during the lunch activities (Assistant Director, personal communication, September 9, 2004). Each retirement community contacted sets up time for special

guests to present programs to the residents. The City of Lenexa also publishes a separate quarterly newsletter that is mailed to each resident.

In summary, based on the review of information obtained, there is a lack of home safety programs targeted towards senior citizens in the Johnson County, Kansas area. It would appear that other departments are also behind in identifying the need to educate the ever-growing senior citizen population. "People over the age of 65 are the fastest growing segment of the American population" (USFA, 1999, p.3). An effective prevention program aimed at reviewing home safety with senior citizens would be about 30 minutes in duration. Making the program available to the senior citizens located in Lenexa, Kansas would be a relatively easy task due to the availability of newsletters, the receptiveness of the individual retirement communities, and the availability of a Webmaster that works for the City of Lenexa.

#### Procedures

In order to gain a full understanding of the type of material that would be most beneficial in developing a program targeted to educate senior citizens concerning home safety, the researcher looked at what the other 12 departments in Johnson County, Kansas (DeSoto, Johnson County Fire District 1, Johnson County Fire District 2 Consolidated, Gardner Department of Public Safety, Leawood, Lexington, Merriam, Olathe, Overland Park, Quivira, Shawnee, and South County) were using for program delivery. Unable to find a sufficient information base locally, the search was expanded to include other organizations outside of the region using the World Wide Web as the search tool, and materials available from the United States Fire Administration Publications Center.



Step two in the procedures involved the review of the material collected. The 12 programs (AARP, AAOS, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, National Research Council Canada, The Elder Care Team, Township of West Milford, NJ, Tempe Fire Department, AZ, Springfield Fire and Life Safety, OR, [www.azaz.essortment.com](http://www.azaz.essortment.com), Island County Fire District 2, City and County of Honolulu, HI, Lexington Fire Department, MA, Borough of Wharton Fire Department) were reviewed to establish common themes. Each program was reviewed for content and timed for duration. A stopwatch was used to mark the beginning and end of each reading, enabling the researcher to chart the average time needed to provide delivery of the programs.

The next step in the procedures was to answer the question concerning the most effective way to reach senior citizens residing in Lenexa, Kansas to provide a program on home safety. This was accomplished by contacting the retirement communities (Lakeview Village, North Point, South Point, Delmar Gardens of Lenexa, and Garden Villas) and inquiring about the number of residents and what the daily routine of the community consisted of. The combined residency of Lakeview Village, North Point, and South Point is 750 people. Delmar Gardens of Lenexa and Garden Villas have 230 residents. Contact was also made with the Lenexa Senior Center, (Assistant Director, personal communication, September 3, 2004) a focal point for seniors residing in Lenexa, Kansas. Information was also provided concerning activities and the availability of seniors. Information was also provided pertaining to the time allotment for guest speakers during the lunch activities. Inquiry was also made to the City of Lenexa Information Services Department (Director, personal communications, September 5, 2004) about web based information availability. Limitations included availability of key

program managers at the retirement communities for interview, availability of seniors, and time/date allotments for guest speakers.

### Results

In reviewing question one, “What types of home safety programs for senior citizens currently exist within Johnson County, Kansas?” only two could be found so a review of 12 fire prevention programs for senior citizens, found by searching the World Wide Web and United States Fire Administration material was completed. Common themes were established to provide a basis for an effective program targeted to educate senior citizens concerning home safety. Those common themes included smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, kitchen safety, smoking materials, exit drills in the home, slips and falls, safety checklists, and emergency phone procedures. While reviewing question two, “What time frame would be needed to provide the program to area senior citizens?”, a stopwatch was used to mark the beginning and end of each reading, enabling the researcher to chart the average time needed to provide delivery of the programs. A delivery time frame of 30 minutes was established by reviewing material obtained and completing mock deliveries. To answer question three, “What would be the most effective way to reach the senior citizens in Lenexa, Kansas to provide a program on home safety?”, the retirement communities and senior center located in Lenexa, Kansas were contacted and provided information on delivering and scheduling programs, making these contacts to be the most effective delivery approach currently available.

As a result of the information obtained, a home safety program targeted to educate senior citizens was developed and is included as Appendix A.

## Discussion

The research showed that there is a need to provide a home safety program to the senior citizens of Lenexa, Kansas because none currently exist. “Older adults – those over 65 years of age – represent one of the highest fire risk groups in the United States, in large part because they are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population.” (USFA, 1999, p.1). The lack of programs in Johnson County, Kansas, only two programs exist within the 13 fire department, magnifies the need. In order to develop a program, resource material had to be obtained from outside the geographical location of Lenexa, Kansas.

Second, the time required to deliver an effective fire prevention program to senior citizens was approximately 30 minutes. The researcher found that this time frame fits well with the scheduled time allotments allowed by the retirement communities and senior center for guest speakers. It falls in line with most of the other public education activities provided by the Lenexa Fire Department.

The last question pertained to the most effective way to reach the senior citizens in Lenexa, Kansas to provide a program on home safety. The study shows that the most effective way to market this type of program in Lenexa, Kansas is to partner with the retirement communities and the senior center. Both of them provide a readily available audience to put the message out to. In addition, by placing an article in the City of Lenexa quarterly newsletter, the message about the availability of this type of program will reach the senior citizens that live in single-family dwellings. As an added measure, web space is also available to promote the programs availability.

The organizational implications for the Lenexa Fire Department is the fact that a prevention program targeted to educate senior citizens concerning home safety is available and can be added to the services provided to the community, enhancing the overall ability to provide quality services to the citizens we protect and serve.

#### Recommendations

Based on this study, the Lenexa Fire Department should implement the prevention program targeted to educate senior citizens concerning home safety. The department's public education program is lacking this type of delivery and it would be very beneficial to the senior citizens that reside in our community. It is easily manageable due to its developed delivery time and a target audience is readily available with little effort needed to make contact with them.. It is also recommended that this be viewed as only the first step in providing public education to the senior citizen population and explore the different opportunities available to make a positive impact on the community.

Any department or organization interested in providing a public education program for senior citizens should use this program as a starting point for determining the needs of their respective community and expand this research if needed.

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## Appendix A

### Lenexa Fire Department Public Education Program

#### Home Safety for Senior Citizens

- I. Introduction
  - a. Introduce presenter
  - b. House keeping issues
  - c. Introduce topic
  
- II. Fire Problem and Older Adults (taken from Fire Risks for the Older Adult, USFA, 1999)
  - a. Fastest growing segment of American population
  - b. Over 1,200 over the age of 65 die as result of fire each year
  - c. Residential fires injure an average of 3,000 older adults per year
  - d. Fires caused by smoking are leading cause of deaths in the elderly
  - e. Fires caused by cooking are the leading cause of fire-related injuries in the elderly
  
- III. Fire Safety Tips
  - a. Smoke Detectors
    1. Single most important step towards saving your life – installing smoke detectors. Lenexa Fire Department has detectors available for those who cannot afford them. Installation help also available.
    2. Locations for installation
      - a. Sleeping areas
      - b. Multiple floors
    3. Testing/Maintaining
      - a. Test batteries monthly
      - b. Replace batteries semi-annually (Daylight savings time reminder)
  
  - b. Fire Extinguishers
    1. City code requirement – One 2 ½ pound ABC extinguisher required in each multi family occupancy
    2. Basic use – P.A.S.S.
    3. Know when to call for help

- c. Kitchen Safety
  - 1. Open flames
    - a. Stop – Drop - Roll
  - 2. Hot surfaces
  - 3. Covering pans with lid
  - 4. Unattended cooking
  
- d. Smoking Materials
  - 1. Smoking in bed
  - 2. Use of oxygen while smoking
  - 3. Unattended smoking material
  
- e. Exit drills in the home (E.D.I. T. H.)
  - 1. Plan escape
  - 2. Practice escape plan
  - 3. Crawl low in smoke
  
- f. Emergency telephone procedures
  - 1. Dial 911 for Fire – Ambulance – Police
    - a. State name
    - b. Address of problem
    - c. Nature of problem
    - d. Call back number

(If residence is on fire, make call from neighbors home – Get out, stay out).

#### IV. Summary