

# Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service – “After the Fire”

## COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION CASE STUDY

### The Opportunity

Sometimes collective intuition forming around similar, repeated questions aligns with an opportunity for change and leads a fire department toward true innovation, moving from “a thing we do, to a way we do things.” Such was the case with the “After the Fire” program developed by the Montgomery County, MD Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS).

### The Action

When MCFRS’ Community Risk Reduction (CRR) staff began receiving questions a few years ago from operations members to better prepare for CRR activities after structure fires, department staff identified that a new community risk assessment tool could provide timely and accurate community information to crews while they were performing outreach and communicating with impacted community members.

### The Outcome

The department went from a relatively limited provision of information and materials during post-fire canvases to a huge suite of CRR information: in-person, online, and via social media. While the “After the Fire” program is focused, the department recognized that its data collection and presentation should span the entire spectrum of identified community risks and has worked to provide this to the public.

#### DEPARTMENT INFO

MONTGOMERY COUNTY FIRE-RESCUE SERVICE

POPULATION SERVED: 1,052,521

TOTAL UNIFORMED PERSONNEL: 2073 TOTAL,  
CAREER AND VOLUNTEER

TOTAL CIVILIAN PERSONNEL: 108

FIRE STATIONS: 37

ISO CLASS: 2/4

GOVERNANCE: COUNTY EXECUTIVE AND  
COUNCIL

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EMS SERVICE PROVIDED: ALS  
TRANSPORT

ANNUAL BUDGET: \$267 MILLION

## Introduction

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On September 23, 2010, Blockbuster Video filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and with the filing ended the run of a video rental company that once had more than 9,000 stores, 84,000 employees, and a market valuation of more than \$3 Billion (NYT. *Blockbuster, Hoping to Reinvent Itself, Files for Bankruptcy*, September 23, 2010; Business Insider. August 12, 2020: <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-rise-and-fall-of-blockbuster-video-streaming-2020-1>)

To think back nearly fifteen years and understanding the digital landscape today, it’s hard to imagine there was a time before there was nearly unlimited access to streaming content. To move away from an idea of “this is the way we’ve always done it” is to embrace some level of threat. In Blockbuster’s case, this was direct mail DVDs and then streaming video developed by Netflix. In the case of the fire service, we don’t face a competitive business environment , but we still must push toward innovation and continuous improvement.

## The Opportunity

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With a planned update from using historic risk management zones (box areas) to census tracts for CRR generally, and post-fire canvas activities specifically, MCFRS was ready for change when offered the opportunity to participate in a pilot program that would provide additional context to its existing community risk assessment and risk reduction efforts. The department was selected to pilot NFPA’s CRA(IG)1300 Community Risk Assessment project, a dashboarding tool which helps departments “identify, assess and mitigate public safety risk.” The department was already working to gain better understanding of those CRR activities with QR-code and app-based data capture, and CRAIG1300 was a logical intersection of both data capture and information provision, because of its link to publicly available data streams and its ability to link to the department’s CRR strategy and incident data.



## The Action



With an initial goal to provide “read ahead” materials for “After the Fire” activities, CRR staff was committed to building on an existing framework. This was also to ensure that any work provided a return-on-investment that maximized CRR staff time and there was future opportunity to expand this work as a “force multiplier” that would focus on non-fire community

vulnerabilities and risks, with the long-term goal of providing wide-ranging, dashboard-based information to fire department members, but more broadly to the community through the CRA(IG)1300 website. Further, feedback from crews indicated that initial efforts to provide “After the Fire” resources seemed to lack an overall strategy, whereas the CRAIG1300 platform increased the level of awareness and resulted in crews using the resources more regularly and with greater consistency.

## The Outcome

Not only has the department seen its planned expansion of non-fire risk assessment move into such areas as a social vulnerability index, but the feedback received from operations crews is notably positive. CRR staff are receiving fewer calls for assistance and clarification, and most notably, the department has seen multiple instances where chief officers have used tools like the index to ask CRR staff to ensure follow-up with a vulnerable member of the community.

With both qualitative and quantitative feedback being positive, staff has worked to integrate CRR awareness into every aspect of the department, beginning at the recruit level and extending through the Career Officers Leadership Academy (COLA)

### After the Fire

2815 Kingswell Drive, Silver Spring 20902  
Date of Fire: 11.23.23 –(Thanksgiving) 10 pm  
No FEI Report received at this writing  
Per FEI: Smoke Alarms not present  
Per FEI: **DISPLACEMENTS: 12 per media**  
YEAR BUILT: 1955



#### Key Snapshot of Info for ATF Efforts:

Smoke Alarm Code Requirements:

Carbon Monoxide Alarm Code Requirements:



#### 1. Smoke Alarms

Homes built in this older 1950's neighborhood [make](#) many of these homes potential candidates for MCFRS to assist and install 10-year, long life sealed battery smoke alarms (Maryland's 2018 law update) if residents have not changed/upgraded their alarms to 10 year, sealed alarms as required by Maryland Law. Renovated/remodeled homes trigger new Code requirements determined by Department of Permitting/Fire Code Compliance.

Smoke alarms should be on every level and outside all sleeping areas. It is recommended to have smoke alarms **INSIDE** bedrooms (Code required in new construction since 1997).

**NOTE:** Since 7/1975, MC Code has required smoke alarms to be hard-wired, outside sleeping areas. It was not until 1989 that smoke alarms were required to be **INTERCONNECTED** and located on every level of the home.

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classes. By beginning with the “entry level” firefighters, the department is providing a basic link and understanding of operations response with CRR activities. This awareness will provide a basis for understanding throughout their careers. With the adoption and constant awareness of these resources, operations crews are more likely to recognize patterns that will lead to needed follow-up and therefore better incident outcomes.

### Tips for Replication

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Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service identified that senior level support for staff to meet an operations division need is critical for the long-term success of a program like “After the Fire” and encourages any department interested in similar efforts and integration to reach out and schedule a demonstration of the work the department has completed:

- *Use available resources.* Whether large or small, any department can use the CRA(IG)1300 tool as a way to integrate department and publicly available data.
- *Only limited by creativity.* An enthusiasm for integrating CRR activities and awareness into day-to-day operations crews’ mindset allows for “anything” to be possible and to focus resources to drive community safety and resiliency.
- *Start early.* Departments should not wait until a member becomes a company/chief officer and has the responsibility for some CRR activities before increasing their awareness of risk reduction’s ties to better operational outcomes.

### About CPSE and Metro

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CPSE and Metro have partnered to develop this series highlighting proven practices of Metro departments accredited by CPSE’s Commission on Fire Accreditation International.