



Arson Control Forum

Topic	Arson – Community Engagement
Title	Arson Freepost Questionnaire Initiative
Service	West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service
Region	Yorkshire & Humberside
Date	2009/10

Issue

Deliberate fires are often set by youths who live in the community, with little regard to the fact that they can be observed by residents whilst carrying out their activities. Secondary fires, although often small in nature, are carried out in such volumes that it has a detrimental effect on the community and severely impacts on the quality of residents' lives.

Those responsible for deliberate fires are often known in the community and residents are frequently in a position to name them. Because of the fear of reprisal, residents need a safe conduit to pass information to the relevant organisations in such a way that they will remain anonymous.

Actions Taken

Based on the fact that residents often know the names of those responsible for the deliberate fires, a questionnaire was devised to be distributed in hotspot areas. The questionnaire gave the residents details of the fire service concern i.e.

Do you know that there have been 12 deliberate vehicle fires in Churchside village in the past 3 months, mainly between 9pm and 11pm? The main concentration of these fires has been in the Lakeside Road area.

Or

Do you know that there have been 7 deliberate wheelie bin fires on East Park Drive, in the past 2 weeks? These have occurred between 5pm and 8pm.

The questionnaire then goes on to say:

Do you know who are responsible for these fires?

The Arson Task Force created a freepost account with Royal Mail and each questionnaire was accompanied by a pre printed freepost envelope. The Fire Authority only pays the postage costs of those envelopes returned.

The Crimestopper logo was incorporated into the questionnaire along with details of how to contact Crimestoppers. This enabled residents to have a choice on how to pass information back to the authorities, either by freepost or telephone, with both methods guaranteeing them anonymity.

Each mail drop into the community has a reference code so that it is possible to measure the return rate in relation to the number of questionnaires distributed.

When completed questionnaires are returned they are photocopied and are passed to the most appropriate enforcement agency. They are also passed as anonymous information to Crimestoppers to be included on police records.

Summary of Benefits Realised

Utilising the freepost questionnaire initiative is proving an invaluable tool in reducing the numbers of deliberate fires.

One initiative focussed on a village that had recently had a lot of deliberate vehicle fires. 500 freepost questionnaires were distributed to the residents by ATF, police and housing staff, engaging with the residents wherever possible. 58 residents replied, many naming the 8 individuals responsible. Following the return of the questionnaires, a multi agency response group was formed which resulted in police and anti-social behaviour convictions. Other agencies, including the housing department also took action against those responsible on the basis of information contained in the questionnaires. The result for the fire service was a total cessation of deliberate vehicle fires and a significant reduction in secondary fires.

Another initiative focussed on an estate experiencing a significant amount of anti social behaviour, attacks on crews and deliberate fires. It was believed that residents on the estate were under reporting for fear of reprisals and therefore the fire service freepost letter drop was instigated. 75 questionnaires were delivered and 10 replies were received back - almost all of them naming the same individuals responsible for the spate of anti-social behaviour on the estate. The replies were forwarded to the police, anti social behaviour units and housing department. As a result 1 ASBO has been introduced and an action plan for the estate has been developed by partner agencies. Since the freepost initiative started on the estate, calls to the police and fire service have dropped significantly.

It must also be remembered that those responsible for the deliberate fires are likely to be living in the area being leafleted with the freepost questionnaires. It will provide a salutary reminder to them that the community is being asked to report on their firesetting activities and as such may deter them.

Contact

If you require any further details about the points raised in this case study, please contact:

Name Richard Brabbs
Title Arson Task Force Co-ordinator
Organisation West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service
Email: dick.brabbs@westyorksfire.gov.uk
Telephone: 0113 3874356 Mobile 07810 187366

Notice: CFOA accepts no liability for the content of this case study or for any acts or omissions resulting from reliance on any such content. CFOA does not limit its liability for death or personal injury caused by its negligence.