



Arson Control Forum

Topic	Arson
Title	Strike Out
Service	Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service
Region	West Midlands
Date	2010

Issue

This study is about the Strike Out campaign that ran throughout Warwickshire prior to and during the 2009 Halloween and Bonfire festive period. Historically, incidents of Deliberate Small Fires (DSF's) and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) significantly increase over this particular period; thus causing massive inconvenience and disruption to the community, local businesses and the emergency services.

The campaign was developed as a direct result of intelligence gathered during Safety Awareness & Fire Education (SAFE) engagement sessions. SAFE sessions are held with children and young people responsible for high numbers of deliberate small fires (DSF's) within the Nuneaton and Bedworth area. It became evident from sessions that those children and young people involved in fire setting activity were able to easily acquire matches and lighters from local shops, which were then used to carryout acts of arson and setting of nuisance fires.

From this information it was concluded that we needed a way to over come this issue and the 'Strike Out' concept was formed.

Actions Taken

We wanted to create a voluntary 'no sale' policy for matches and lighters in all shops within Warwickshire and to achieve this we needed to work in partnership with the local retail community.

'Strike Out' works on the simple premise that since October 2007 it had been illegal for those under 18 years of age to purchase tobacco products. To this end, we saw no reasonable justification for children and young people under that age to possess matches and lighters.

Across the county local shops and businesses were approached by WFRS Arson Task Force, local Area Risk Teams and PCSO's. The business owners / managers were given an explanation of the objectives of the 'Strike Out' campaign, the reasons why the campaign was being carried out and encouraged to voluntarily sign-up to the scheme. A letter, explaining the scheme and a poster, for display within the shop, were left with the staff. These "tools" were made available on the WFRS web pages as resources that could be downloaded by retail outlets. The scheme was further supported by a press release and a radio interview to give maximum exposure. All those business approached agreed to

sign-up to the campaign and all comments from businesses were very positive.

Summary of Benefits Realised

The evaluation process shows that local shops and businesses were very supportive of the Strike Out initiative and found it to be of benefit to their staff and / or business. Many businesses found by displaying the Strike Out poster was in itself, on many occasions enough to discourage children and young people from attempting to buy matches and / or lighters by formally announcing the shops policy on sale. Those involved also showed an overwhelming support for WFRS to pursue a change in the law.

The statistical evidence below is based on 85 individual shops and businesses that completed and returned evaluation forms: Over 88% of respondents believed that displaying a poster stating the businesses policy of 'no sale to under 18's' empowered staff to refuse the sale of those goods.

Over 68% of respondents reported a reduction in the number of children and young people attempting to buy matches and lighters simply by displaying the poster.

Over 82% of respondents reported that the poster and policy did not create occasions where children and young people verbally abused their staff.

Face to face discussions with owners, managers and staff highlighted, on many occasions, their frustration with the laws of sale, i.e. there are legal age restrictions on the sale tobacco products, lighter fluid and gas refills but no such restrictions for matches and lighters and therefore not enforceable by law. Consequently WFRS are investigating the establishment of a local bylaw to cover this legal loop hole.

Although the scheme was targeted and designed to combat the seasonal spike in DSF's mentioned previously, the letter to businesses and display poster are non specific to the seasonal problem, therefore it was decided that the scheme should be left to continue. The initiative is still available for shops and businesses to download from the internet.

It should be noted, that some of the larger (national) outlets such as Tesco, Spa, One-Stop and Co-op have already implemented there own company policy to restrict sale of these goods. This is generally based on the national policy for alcohol sale "If you look under 21 you will be asked for identification"

Contact

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