

# Ring in Fire Safety

**Report on Program Findings**

July 2011



[www.soundthealarmtoday.org](http://www.soundthealarmtoday.org)

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During the Spring of 2010, the International Code Council (ICC) received a Fire Prevention & Safety Grant from the federal government to implement Sound the Alarm, a community outreach and education program designed to reduce rural community fire hazards and other potential dangers in residential homes. The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) assisted with the implementation of this program, which was piloted in three states: Alabama, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee.

Through Sound the Alarm, teams of fire department members, Fire Corps volunteers, and building officials conducted home safety checks, installed smoke alarms, and completed follow up evaluations in rural communities in the pilot states. Results from the home safety inspections showed that fewer than 20 percent of the homes were adequately covered by functional smoke alarms and 52 percent of the households did not have an escape plan. Sound the Alarm teams took measures to remedy these situations with every inspection, leaving each household fully covered by smoke alarms and equipped with an escape plan, among other enhancements for the safety of each household visited.



The states which participated in the pilot program were chosen in part because of their high fire death rates. Interested fire departments within these states completed a short survey to determine which communities would make the best fit for Sound the Alarm. Preference was given to communities with a population of 2,500 or less, and survey questions focused on how many fires and fire-related injuries and deaths the community experiences, the frequency of the department's fire education and smoke alarm programs and outreach, and whether fire inspections and smoke alarm replacement programs have been or are being conducted.

The Sound the Alarm web site launched in August. The web site – [www.soundthealarmtoday.org](http://www.soundthealarmtoday.org) – contains a multitude of resources about fire and general home safety, as well as information about smoke alarms. First Alert provided a short video clip that offers guidance for installing smoke alarms in homes. The video and other resources, such as the home safety checklist; flyers; PSAs; and safety tips for families, are available for participating teams as well as the general public. These resources will remain available indefinitely, making this portion of the program sustainable-even without additional funding.

In all, 19 Sound the Alarm teams were selected and each team was provided with a toolkit that contained the items they needed to perform smoke alarm installations and home safety inspections. The smoke alarms, provided by First Alert, arrived in October and conference calls were subsequently held with the team leaders to prepare the teams for project implementation.

Over the next six months, each of the teams reached out to their community to offer free home safety inspections and smoke alarm replacements or installations. A total of 147 homes were visited throughout the course of the pilot program, for which over 620 smoke alarms were installed. While the Sound the Alarm teams were able to make many homes safer, the initial home safety inspections revealed some troubling statistics.

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# Results from the Home Safety Checks

- > Only 22% of homes had a fire extinguisher on every level of the home.
- > 86% of homes did not have any carbon monoxide detectors.
- > 80% of homes did not have smoke alarms in every bedroom.
- > 20% of homes only had one smoke alarm previously installed; 12% did not have a smoke alarm at all.
- > 37% of homes had at least one smoke alarm that was not working.
- > 65% had smoke alarms that were over 10 years old (the useful life of a smoke alarm).
- > 52% of the visited households did not have an escape plan.
- > Approximately 21% of decks were not securely fastened to the structure and supported.
- > 17% of decks did not have proper railings.
- > 17% of decks did not have the needed handrails
- > 19% of decks had rotten or decayed boards that needed to be replaced
- > 44% of pools, hot tubs, or other large bodies of water were either not surrounded by a four-foot fence or barrier with a self-closing gate that locks on the “inside” or did not have a cover that meets industry standards.
- > 1 in 4 homes had deadbolt locks that cannot be unlocked from the inside without a key.
- > Only 34% of homes with children present have child locks on cabinets that are used to store dangerous items.
- > Only 83% of homes had their correct address properly displayed
- > 10% of homes had weeds, grass, vines, or other growth that needed to be cut down or removed
- > 13% of homes with barbeque grills did not have them located a sufficient distance away from their combustible deck
- > 45% of homes did not have an emergency supply kit
- > 27% of homes did not have emergency phone numbers programmed into the phone or posted near it
- > 13% of laundry rooms/dryer vents had accumulated lint
- > 13% of homes have electrical switches and receptacles without proper cover plates

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## What the teams had to say about Sound the Alarm:

“We found some homes that had no working smoke detectors and that makes what we were doing worth the time and effort.”

- Chief Chris Holmes, Baxter FD (TN)

“The program is a huge success here and it really helps us promote the fire safety. We have families asking us just about every week to be included in the program.”

- Asst. Chief Bryan Palmer, Black Lick VFD (PA)

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“To my surprise most homes have had no alarms at all.”

- Chief Gary Eddings, Sharon FD (TN)





## About the ICC

The International Code Council is a member-focused association dedicated to helping the building safety community and construction industry provide safe, sustainable and affordable construction through the development of codes and standards used in the design, build and compliance process. Most U.S. communities and many global markets choose the International Codes.

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*Supporting Those Who Serve*

## About the NVFC

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) is the leading nonprofit membership association representing the interests of the volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services. The NVFC serves as the voice of the volunteer in the national arena and provides invaluable tools, resources, programs, and advocacy for first responders across the nation. The NVFC also administers Fire Corps, a Citizen Corps program that connects community volunteers with their local fire and emergency service departments to assist in non-emergency tasks. Learn more at [www.nvfc.org](http://www.nvfc.org) and [www.firecorps.org](http://www.firecorps.org).

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