

# Delaware Fire Service offers important lessons for fire prevention programs nationwide

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A new study by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy finds fire and life safety programs in Delaware offer a strategic, comprehensive and coordinated approach to fire prevention.

The study, which involved in-depth interviews with members of the state's fire service, highlights the diversity of prevention initiatives underway in the state and documents how tradition, dedication, and a sense of community are keys to success for the program. Delaware was chosen for the study because some federal fire officials view the state as a model for fire and life safety practices. The report, published in the November issue of *Journal of [Public Health Management and Practice](#)*, offers recommendations to states and localities across the country looking to improve their fire and life safety activities.

Fire and life safety education encompasses community fire and injury prevention efforts. Examples include smoke alarm distribution initiatives and programs that aim to address recidivism among fire-setting youth. In 2009, residential fires in the U.S. resulted in more than 2,500 civilian deaths, 13,000 injuries and property loss of almost \$7.8 billion.

"Close to 90 percent of fire departments in the U.S. conduct fire and life safety programs, yet little is known about the factors that influence their success and sustainability," said lead study author Shannon Frattaroli,

PhD, MPH, an assistant professor with the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy, part of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "By examining the culture and context of a specific state's program and sharing what we learn, we hope to help other states improve their own fire and life safety services."

Using the case study method, the researchers collected data from in-person key informant interviews, direct observation of fire prevention events, and relevant documents such as programmatic materials. Key informants included members of the Delaware Volunteer Firemen's Association (DVFA), local fire chiefs, and representatives from the State's Fire Marshal's Office.

"Of the characteristics that emerged about the Delaware fire service's approach to prevention, a sense of community was perhaps the strongest theme," said Andrea Gielen, ScD, a co-author of the study and the director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy. Many of those interviewed reported their involvement with Delaware's various communities as essential to the effectiveness of their work. "We learned that partnerships with schools, the media and local business are integral to expanding the reach of fire safety and prevention programs throughout the state. This finding is of particular importance given the impact of the nation's economic woes on fire service budgets."

The researchers also examined the extent to which Delaware fire service professionals are engaged in policy advocacy efforts, such as hosting legislative appreciation events. "With several promising fire prevention policy initiatives gaining momentum, including efforts to expand residential sprinkler requirements, it's important to consider how the fire service can work with public health professionals to advance such policy efforts," stated Frattaroli. "I firmly believe these efforts could benefit from greater coordination between public health and [fire](#) service advocates. Public health professionals should consider the steps

necessary to advance this approach."

**More information:** "Fire Prevention in Delaware: A Case Study of Fire and Life Safety Initiatives", *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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