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Home Fire Preparedness

By Ishbel Dickens

The Board of Directors of NMHOA is pleased to announce that we have voted to join the American Red Cross in support of the Home Fire Preparedness Campaign and its goal to reduce the number of deaths and injuries caused by home fires by 25% in five years. Achieving this goal is beyond the means of any one organization. Together, we need to build and strengthen existing coalitions of local fire departments, houses of worship, businesses, schools, public health departments, social service agencies, neighborhood leaders, private sector and additional stakeholders to target campaign efforts and reach households most likely to experience a fire. At the local level, there might currently be resources for providing homeowners with smoke detectors and possibly carbon monoxide detectors, which provides a head start in some areas.

Home fires kill an average of seven people every day. Every 40 minutes, an injury from a home fire is reported. Roughly 1,000 times every day, fire departments are called to a home fire. Home structure fires cause roughly \$7 billion in direct property damage per year, or an average of more than \$20,000 per fire. We have an opportunity to make a difference in our communities and save lives tragically lost due to home fires. We agree to work together and look forward to supporting local coalitions to promote fulfillment of the following cornerstone elements of this strategy:

- 1) Door-to-door installation of smoke alarms and completion of a home-safety checklist and plan in vulnerable neighborhoods;
- 2) Engagement of youth in classrooms and after school with technology, challenges, and science-based education;
- 3) A marketing and public relations campaign to motivate people to take action to save themselves, their families, and their neighbors by checking smoke alarms and practicing evacuating when the alarm goes off.

Proper smoke alarm installation is critical to reducing home fire deaths. Working together, we will support the formation of local coalitions to identify and reach neighborhoods most vulnerable to experiencing a home fire and install up to 500,000 smoke alarms across the country each year. National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) estimates that the 4% of homes without smoke alarms represent more than one quarter of reported home fires and more than one-third of home fire deaths. Working smoke alarms cut the risk of dying in a fire in half.

Youth engagement will include school- and after-school-based programs aimed at educating young people about fire safety, a youth-oriented smart phone app that will make learning about disasters fun and a youth challenge aimed at harnessing the creativity of America's young people to solve the complex problems around home-fire prevention.

Finally, the marketing campaign will support the strategy by encouraging individuals who feel responsible for others to test their smoke alarms and know their escape plans. NFPA reports

almost one-quarter of home fire deaths resulted from fires in which smoke alarms failed to operate, usually due to missing, disconnected or dead batteries. Fire science further reveals that people may have as little as two minutes to evacuate after a fire starts.

We are committed to work together to seek and provide the collective resources needed to fulfill the cornerstone elements of this strategy and look forward to supporting the formation of local coalitions to implement the outreach to households, youth, and the community to realize the goal of reducing the tragic loss of life from home fires.