

Fire Research Report

Applying the Conversion Model™ to Changing At Risk Groups Attitudes towards Fire Safety

**Research
International**

October 2010

This project aimed to quantify the link between improved fire outcomes and demographic changes, with a specific focus on urbanisation. Sources of demographic data that may be linked to fire outcome improvements were identified and quantified. The investigation into the relationships between a range of demographic variables and fire outcomes in different areas of New Zealand, found no single demographic factor reduced the average rate of fires and structural fires, but rather a group of factors influence fire outcomes. Additionally four case studies were also examined. These case studies illustrated how fire outcomes have changed in response to demographic factors in a major urban, secondary urban and rural setting. They provide examples of how the needs of communities change as their demographic profiles change.

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Project Kindle

Applying the Conversion Model™ to Changing At Risk Groups Attitudes towards Fire Safety

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1.0 Abstract

Title: Project Kindle – Applying the Conversion Model™ to changing at risk groups' attitudes toward fire safety.

Purpose: Identify barriers and motivators that could act as strategy and communications springboards, for targeting people most “at risk” from fire.

Approach: Eight focus group discussions with “at risk” people open to change. At risk groups being defined as rural/elderly/Maori/Pacific People and those renting.

Key findings

- Motivators and barriers are similar across at risk different groups, though the hierarchy of importance and expression of these can differ.
- Barriers to a fire safe lifestyle include:
 - People don't believe fire will impact them and if it does, consequences will be minor; (that is, they do not believe they will die).
 - Therefore fire safety is not “top of mind”, behaviours fall through the cracks; especially at times of distraction.
 - It costs time and money to act on fire safety; cost is greater than the perceived risk.
 - A lack of knowledge and knowledge sources.
 - A lack of ownership (of the problem and possessions).
- Three components to motivating fire safe behaviours:
 1. Making it real:
 - People must believe fire can happen to them with consequences significant and long lasting.
 - Longer term emotional consequences of fire can be significant motivators for fire safety beyond the fire itself
 - E.g. facial burn may lead to loss of “attractiveness, physical prowess and opportunity, potentially leading to discrimination”.
 - Guilt/blame, inability to provide for family, close and extended.
 2. Intervening at appropriate times:
 - People's life cycles provide points where they reevaluate attitudes and behaviours. These disruption points provide fertile ground for intervention.
 3. Providing constant varied messages, that feature different:
 - a. Fire scenarios, locations and causes;
 - b. Consequences, long and short term, physical and emotive and not just death; and
 - c. Messages - positive and negative.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	Abstract	2
2.0	Background	4
3.0	Key Research Outcomes	5
4.0	Research Objectives	5
5.0	Method	6
6.0	Key Findings.....	8
7.0	Social Change: Good things take time.....	12
8.0	What is Fire Safety?	14
9.0	Attitudes to Fire Safety	16
10.0	Core Barriers to Fire Safety.....	18
10.1.	Denial – It won't happen to me.....	18
10.2.	If fire does occur, it won't be a major deal - we'll bounce back.....	19
10.3.	I can't necessarily prevent it.....	20
10.4.	Consciousness.....	20
10.5.	Perceived cost of fire safety: Time and money.....	21
10.6.	Lack of knowledge/education.....	23
10.7.	Lack of ownership (of the possessions or the issue!).....	24
11.0	Overcoming Barriers	25
11.1.	Making It Real	25
11.1.1	What is real?	25
11.1.1.1	Personal relevance	25
11.1.1.2	Significant consequences	26
11.1.1.3	Relevant and believable consequences?.....	27
11.1.1.4	The impact of time	28
11.1.1.5	The emotion behind the consequence	29
11.1.1.6	Linking consequences to what's important to an individual.....	31
11.1.1.7	How about positive messages?	32
11.2.	Appropriate Interventions	33
11.2.1	So when are these re-evaluation points?	33
11.2.2	Other Interventions	35
11.3.	Constant Relevant and Varied Reminders	36
12.0	The Role of Children for All Groups.....	37
13.0	Appendices	38
13.1	Appendix 1 – Collages.....	38



2.0 Background

The primary reason for undertaking this research was to help identify messages that can be communicated to at risk groups to better encourage fire safe attitudes and behaviours. The Conversion Model™ is proven at identifying people both open to positive change and at risk of lapsing to undesirable fire safety behaviours. While the Conversion Model™ is great at identifying who these people are, it does not tell us how to reach them and convince them to change their behaviour in a desired way.

Of concern to the New Zealand Fire Service are groups of people who are most at risk of slipping into less fire safe behaviours. Those groups considered to be most 'at risk' include Maori, Pacific People, the elderly, rural residents and renters. Through monitoring of the Conversion Model™, concern has grown that these 'at risk' groups do not appear to be shifting toward living more fire safe lifestyles. The New Zealand Fire Service would like to understand what would motivate these groups to change their attitudes and behaviours towards being more fire safe.

Focus group discussions were commissioned to help develop a deeper understanding of the factors and images that would encourage individuals to lead a more fire safe lifestyle. It is hoped that this research would help shape future campaigns targeted at these groups.

3.0 Key Research Outcomes

The key aim of this research was to identify strategies and communication springboards that resonate with people most “at risk” from fire, but who are “open” to changing their current behaviours. In short, it was about identifying the people most likely to change their behaviour and identifying messages to facilitate the change.

4.0 Research Objectives

A number of key research objectives for this study were identified;

- Identify and understand what underlying drivers exist that can be used to motivate a behavioural change in the target markets.
 - What are the existing functional and emotive barriers to change?
 - What functional and emotive factors will act as effective motivators?
- Identify relevant images, messages and expressions that activate these drivers amongst the target market.
 - Understanding how these images, messages and expressions are relevant
 - Understand when participants are open to receiving these messages
 - Understand the types of channels that we can use to communicate to at-risk groups
- Understand the relevant consequences that are most motivating to each of the core at-risk groups.
 - Understand the underlying nuances between groups and within groups
 - Understand the emotions that are attached to these consequences and how these can motivate more fire safe behaviours

5.0 Method

This research comprised 8 qualitative focus group discussions. These groups were conducted with people considered to be most “at-risk” of fire but open to changing their current behaviours. The group breakdown is displayed in the table below.

	Rural	Metropolitan
European	1	1
Maori	1	1
Pacific Peoples	1	1
Elderly	1	1

Other sample considerations included;

- 50:50 split of male and female
- All were screened as being ‘open to change’
- Spread of home owners and renters, age, locations, life stage

Respondents were not recruited based on any prior experience with having a fire.

All of the fieldwork was conducted in Auckland in May 2010 and each group had 8 participants. The focus groups lasted for approximately 2.5 hours each and were moderated by fully trained qualitative specialists.

The Role of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is exploratory in nature and is designed to uncover the full range of barriers and motivators (both functional and emotive), to fire safe behaviour.

Focus group discussions are used when topics are not sensitive in nature and when we wish to spark discussion and/or ideas. For this research where fire safety was not top of mind we chose the group format to help people bring into consciousness things that are important to them. During focus groups participants tend to enthusiastically express their attitudes, perceptions and imagery around social issues, providing significant insights that cannot be gained in any other manner. The group dynamics encourage members to interact with and respond to one another, often sparking recall of hidden memories and thoughts.

Qualitative research uses a full range of projective and enabling techniques designed to elicit both rational factors that are top of mind and deeper emotive factors that are less conscious but are often more important in driving behaviour.

NOTE: As part of this process respondents were taken through an exercise called guided visualisation. In the visualisation people were asked to “imagine” the events that might lead up to a fire in their house, the fire itself, the time after the fire at different intervals and consequences they imagined at each of these time intervals. The purpose of this activity was to uncover perceived causes, consequences and emotions that surround a fire.

Several quotes that appear in the body of this report imply the respondent has been the victim of fire – whereas these quotes refer to the guided visualisation activity.

Homework

As part of the discussion process we also had participants complete some homework prior to attending the groups. We had participants create a collage to illustrate the things that are most important to them and how they would feel if they lost those things. This collage topic relates well to the concept of fire in someone’s lives due to the loss that people can suffer from a fire. Participants are able to assess what is really important to their lives and the reasons why.

Collages serve a number of purposes. Firstly, they ‘warm-up’ participants and get them thinking about the topic. This brings into ‘consciousness’ attitudes and behaviours that they may not have been consciously aware of. Collages also help us to visualise peoples feelings and it helps them to better articulate what motivates them. This allows us to maximise valuable interview time.

Some examples of participants’ collages have been attached at the end of this report. See Appendix 1.



6.0 Key Findings

- Cultural and social change is slow and should be evaluated as such. Fire safety requires a cultural shift likely to be generational in nature.
- Changes in behaviour and improvements in the outcomes are real measures of success, not necessarily modeled attitudes.
 - The question design of the Conversion Model™ will make it difficult to migrate people up the commitment continuum given the low involvement most people have toward fire safety. While not always visible at an attitudinal level, end results may show the messages are being taken to heart.
- There are prevailing attitudes amongst the at risk groups that:
 - Fire is unlikely and often due to unpreventable accidents
 - The consequences of fire are thought to be short-lived and usually easy to recover from. Death is not seen as a realistic consequence of fire – people believe they will get out of a fire; and
 - There is some belief amongst higher socio-ec groups, that fire is more an issue for lower socio groups both in terms of occurrences and severity of the outcomes.
- Fire safety equals common sense and having a smoke alarm. It takes a bit of probing before other factors come to the top of a persons mind.
- The key barriers to acting fire safe are:
 - Denial:
 - There is no belief that fires will impact people personally, so why worry about it
 - There is no belief that consequences other than the loss of “things” will occur
 - Harm (especially death) to self/others is seen as unlikely. People believe they will get out of a fire before this can happen
 - Fires are accidents:
 - Not always preventable
 - Fire safety is not “top of mind”:
 - The perception that fires are rare and realistic consequences and not that significant means that fire safety is not at the forefront of people's minds
 - Costs: time and money:
 - People feel fire safe behaviours involve the need to give up time or money, both of which are weighed up against the perceived lack of risk of actually having a fire
 - Lack of knowledge about fire and where to find out more; People are unaware of and certainly have not visited the fire service web site.
 - Lack of ownership (of the problem and possessions):
 - Particularly for renters, the actual house and some of the possessions within it are not their own, so there is little concern over the potential that it may burn down

- Three key areas have been identified to help encourage at risk groups to act with fire safety in mind:
 1. Make it real
 2. Utilise natural life stage intervention points
 3. Keep messages constant and varied
- Make It Real: Making messages real means reinforcing to people that fire risks are real, they can happen to everyone and that the consequences are significant and long lasting. Appropriate ways to do this include:
 - Communicating consequences that are both believable and that generate anxiety. Death as a consequence is seen as unlikely, so for many, the direct message may not resonate. However, injury or the long term impacts of smoke inhalation and burns are seen as both likely and alarming. The loss of irreplaceable sentimental items and pets are also key motivators.
 - People focus on the fire event and time immediately after the fire when thinking of the consequences. For many the real consequences don't hit home until weeks after the event and may continue for a lifetime. The long term impact of fire is motivating to at risk groups.
 - The long term emotive consequences of fire may be powerful messages to at risk groups, at least as powerful as messages that focus on the immediate tangible effect of a fire: While death may be seen as unlikely, messages of the guilt you would feel if your actions or inaction caused someone else to suffer or die carries weight.
 - For some key groups, the feelings of failure due to the inability to provide for the family and community also strike accord.
 - For others the emotion from consequences like burn scarring can raise awareness amongst at risk groups, for example facial burns reducing attractiveness to the opposite sex, reducing ability to gain employment or continue in ones employment.
 - A further example may be; fire leads to a physical injury which in turn leads to inability to provide for the family or community. This transformation turns the individual from a person of status or mana to a person dependent on the community. In a collective society such as Pacific culture this loss of status is an especially powerful message.
 - For some people positive messages can act as strong communications platforms, when combined with messages demonstrating real and significant consequences of failing to be fire safe
 - For example, messages of **responsibility** for others care, **peace of mind**, **empowerment** and **taking control** all provide different tones and vehicles to communicate to at risk groups.

- Natural Intervention Points: There are times where people are more receptive to messages about changing their attitudes and behaviours. People's lifecycles provide natural points where their thought processes are being disrupted and these points provide fertile ground for fire safety messages. The New Zealand Fire Service could look to partner with organisations integral to each of these life stages e.g. plunket, insurance companies and banks, schools and real-estate companies. The key intervention points identified in the life cycle are identified are:
 - School years
 - Moving out of home
 - First home buyers
 - Having children
 - First grandchildren
 - Retirement
 - Death of partner
- Constant and Varied Messages: Fire Safety is not top of mind. People need constant reminders at appropriate times and places
 - For example, fridge magnets with critical "simple" messages for target groups about kitchen fire safety
 - The more relevant reminders people get that fire happens regularly to people like them, the better the chances of them changing their fire safety attitudes and behaviours
 - This overcomes key barriers of denial and lack of consciousness.

More Detailed Findings



7.0 Social Change: Good things take time...

Social and cultural change is generally a generational shift. It is not like fashion. People do not expect to have to change the habits of a lifetime, especially if their current behaviour has not resulted in a negative outcome.

Social and cultural change is a long journey and fire safety is potentially a harder sales job than other social marketing projects. This is because fire is not seen as likely to happen, nor are the consequences severe. And, fires are more likely to be seen as accidents rather than the result of behavioural action/inaction.

Some examples of social marketing projects that have taken a long time to begin changing and shifting people's attitudes and behaviours are:

- Socially responsible drinking
- Drink driving
- Incidence of smoking
- Domestic violence

In all the above examples there are clear boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (and in most cases there are corresponding laws to reinforce socially acceptable behaviour). Clear actions that lead to the boundary being crossed also exist. The consequences of crossing the boundary are usually seen as clear, believable and common place, and these consequences are seen as personally relevant and significant from a social, physical and legal perspective. The same cannot be said in the area of fire safety.

The persistent and consistent messages of other social campaigns and exposure to many generations has educated younger people on socially responsible behaviours. Building this information into their general knowledge helps to begin shifting behaviours as the youth become the role models for new generations.

Smoking is a particularly good example of how change has taken time and how it is usually the younger generation coming through that affects the change. It has taken a long time, but now we have started to see significant reductions in smoking even amongst the highest risk groups like younger Maori and Pacific females.

Implications

The New Zealand Fire Service needs to ensure that the way they measure progress reflects the nature of the change. That is, if behaviour has been modified or awareness raised then it is a good result, if the outcomes are positive then it is a good result and the aim should become to work to keep it there. Also if the change is generational and driven by the actions of younger people, the efforts of the New Zealand Fire Service with youth of at risk groups cannot be underestimated.

What it also means is that we potentially need to identify "boundaries" with which people can compare their behaviour. These benchmarks would allow individuals to objectively see whether their actions are responsible and socially acceptable and attach to these actions consequences seen as personally relevant and significant from a social, physical and legal perspective.

An Observation

The Conversion Model™ does throw up some very high thresholds. For example, “I consider fire safety **in nearly everything I do**”.

Some of these thresholds may not lend themselves to migration to ***committed*** segments in this (low involvement) category, despite real attitudinal and behavioural shifts. This means that what is being observed in the Conversion Model™ may not reflect the shifts that are beginning to occur in reality. As mentioned earlier, modification of behaviours and raising awareness is a positive outcome for social campaigns; this may not be captured by the high threshold statements used to classify changes with groups.



8.0 What is Fire Safety?

For most, 'fire safety' means having smoke alarms. For people this is the most actionable and conscious behaviour related to fire safety. The conscious and physical action required to install and check smoke alarms and also the advertising about smoke alarms makes it top of mind as the meaning of fire safety.

Second to smoke alarms, are awareness and knowledge of risks, preventative behaviours and what to do in the event of a fire. For example, people say that just knowing what a fire risk is in their home is part of being fire safe.

“...I generally think just a fire alarm and knowing the exits is enough and the rest is just common sense...”

(Male, Pacific Metro)

It is worth noting here that it requires greater prompting before people reveal other behaviours that they believe contribute to fire safety.

After prompting, people began to include the following as contributing to fire safety. That is to say, people acknowledge that these are the things they should be doing, not necessarily the things that they are doing.

- Having a fire extinguisher
- Turning off household appliances
- Guards on open fires
- Exit plans
- Not leaving the stove unattended
- Keeping things away from heaters
- Awareness of flammable clothing
- Extinguishing cigarettes and hiding lighters

Some differences exist across the different at risk groups in terms of fire safety.

There appears to be greater awareness and knowledge of fire safety for rural groups, particularly around laws about open fires, chemicals and petrols, and checking chimney flumes. This is a result of their isolation and in some cases great distance from the nearest fire station. The elderly perceived themselves to have a greater awareness and consciousness about fire and openly state this. 'We know best through years of experience' is the attitude that sits behind this perception, although the level of fire safe behaviours in the elderly is similar to that of the other at risk groups. Given the growing number of elderly in New Zealand, especially those living alone, there is certainly a need to reinforce that their abilities are not what they once were and therefore actions and attitudes are no longer appropriate.

Importantly, when asked what they would do in a fire, virtually no one thought to dial 111. On the one hand this shows that people's first priority is to get out of the house, but it also shows the reliance people place on others to help. This may present an opportunity to communicate "neighbourly behaviours". Dial first, ask questions later.

Implications

The key implication of people's prevailing attitudes to fire safety is that most people know what fire safety means but because it is not "top of mind" and there is little belief that fire will happen to them, appropriate behaviours sometimes fall through the cracks. Essentially there is low involvement in the fire safety category and so fire safety has only limited meaning.

Communicating to the aged that they need to be more vigilant now more than ever is needed, as is a reminder that 111 is a vital part of the fire safety message.

People need constant and varied reminders of what fire safety actually is. This means relentless communication that continues to educate and motivate action all year round. In addition to current communications there is also a need to communicate fire safety messages in situ. As fire safe behaviours are less 'conscious decisions', bringing messages into the situation where they are required begins to make the action conscious. The aim being that eventually these reminders will not even need to exist as fire safety will spring to mind in the situation on its own. For example, cooking messages in the kitchen (such as fridge magnets), messages to not overload power boards in the living room and so on.



9.0 Attitudes to Fire Safety

Fire safety is unanimously stated to be important, however it is low on people's list of daily concerns and pressures. There are a number of reasons for this but most importantly, people simply do not believe they will be the victim of fire, and secondly, if they do fall victim, the consequences will be manageable and short lived.

“Fires are less likely, you see more stories about drink driving than fires...”

(Male Metro Maori)

For most, fire seems like a low probable risk as they perceive fires to happen infrequently. There appears to be a low awareness of the number of fires that occur overall in New Zealand but also within their own neighbourhoods, with the 'it happens to other people' mentality. Spontaneous responses show people also perceive the consequences as being material and reversible, meaning that the immediate loss of items through burning or smoke damage can easily be replaced through insurance or purchase of a new replacement. The lack of insurance for some groups, such as low income flatters, Maori and Pacific People, means that this consequence is perceived as more serious than for others. This gives us an opportunity to communicate the potential of financial loss through fire to these groups, giving them a realistic consequence to contemplate.

Participants can cite many fire safe behaviours that they should be doing, however they also believe this is not something that they think about on a daily basis. In general, participants' daily concerns revolve more around their priority issues such as finances, rather than their everyday actions that are related to fire safety. There is an opportunity here to show how fire safety or the lack of it can have a very negative impact on the top of mind things that are important. For example, fire can mean loss of money or result in financial hardship.

Other reasons why fire safety is lower down the priority list include the perception that fires are 'accidents' that are not necessarily preventable. People have the impression that fires are unpredictable and can happen at any time, no matter what actions you may or may not take.

There is also a perception that behaviours which cause fires, such as leaving a stove unattended, are less of a conscious decision. Everyone knows that you should not leave the stove unattended, but still freely admit to doing just that.

People often compare fire safety to drink driving to demonstrate the difference in the decision making process, stating that you consciously choose to drink and drive. It is important to highlight that any actions taken around situations where fire safety is needed is also a conscious engaged decision, bringing more weight to the decision and making the likelihood of fire more of a preventable reality than an accident.

A belief held by many in the higher socio-economic groups is that fires are more likely to happen to lower socio-economic groups. They believe that those who are in these groups are less well equipped against fire (both in terms of knowledge and tools like alarms and extinguishers) and are thus more likely to suffer from more serious fires than themselves. This means that communications may be seen as less relevant by higher socio-economic groups. The only way that relevance can be shown is through facts illustrating that fire does strike at all segments of the New Zealand society.

The implication of people's attitudes to fire safety is that while acknowledging that fire safety is important and that they are open to changing their behaviours, at risk people are still very relaxed when it comes to fire safety. Until people believe fire is likely and the consequences are seen as relevant, significant and long lasting, it will be difficult to motivate a change amongst these people.



10.0 Core Barriers to Fire Safety

Seven core barriers to fire safety were identified in this research. These are outlined below.

10.1. Denial – It won't happen to me

“I really can't imagine a fire starting in our house”

(Male Metro Elderly)

The first identified barrier to fire safety was denial;

- It doesn't happen often, incidence is extremely rare.
- It won't happen to me, after all, it never has (this was especially true for the elderly).

“It seems like kind of a far away thing (fires)... it won't happen to you...”

(Male Urban European)

“I think [the probability of house fire] quite low, there wouldn't even be 1% of houses in NZ burnt...”

(Male Elderly Rural)

Many believe a fire would not happen to them given the perceived low incidence, their history and social standing. While this point of view is pervasive across all at risk groups, the elderly and higher socio-economic respondents were especially likely to have this opinion. These groups believe that they have the experience, knowledge and equipment necessary to greatly reduce the chances of them having a fire (the fires they can envisage occurring in their homes are usually not of their doing).

“I think that because we are older we have a better developed common sense and because we come from a better socio economic background”

(Female Elderly Rural)

“It hasn't happened to us”

(Male Rural European)

The implication of this barrier is that unless people believe that they could realistically suffer from fire, they are unlikely to consciously change their attitudes and behaviours. First and foremost, efforts need to be directed at making people see that fire occurs regularly to people of all segments of the community and the consequences suffered by all groups are relevant, significant and long lasting.

10.2. If fire does occur, it won't be a major deal - we'll bounce back

The second core barrier to fire safe behaviours is the perceived impact of fire. People not only believe the chances of fire are remote, but if they are “unlucky” enough to fall victim of fire, the consequences will likely be insignificant (or at least can be overcome) and short-lived.

- If it does happen to me – “I’ll” be ok.
- It’s only stuff, it can be replaced.
- If I lose my possessions – insurance will replace them.
- The outcomes are short lived; we’ll pick ourselves up and move on.

“At the end of the day it is just stuff, we are insured so we’d pick ourselves up and move on”

(Male Elderly Rural)

The more serious consequences of fire, such as death and injury, are not believed to be very likely. People believe they will be aware of the fire in time to get out of the house especially if they have a smoke alarm.

That means that most people believe they will just lose possessions in the event of a fire. And irrespective of whether they have insurance or not, the initial reactions to the thought of having a fire are the same – everyone would get out uninjured, and they would pick themselves up and move on.

Those people with insurance at first thought, is that insurance will replace everything, so it will be a minor inconvenience. But after a little prompting there is realisation that the cover people have probably wouldn’t totally replace everything and then it dawns that in fact not everything “IS” replaceable, those more sentimental photos, possessions etc.

Those people who do not have insurance also initially believe that after a fire they will be fine and will move on. But again it does not take much prompting for people to recognise how many possessions they have and how much effort has gone into acquiring them. And after that there is not much of a leap to really understanding that the losses are in fact great and would have a major long term impact.

“We’re not insured. A fire that destroyed everything would ruin us”

(Male Maori Rural)

In both the above cases, it is not a large jump from “we’ll be fine” to actually the consequences being “pretty significant”. But the fact is there is a jump to be made. Basically, the perceived chances of a personally significant / personally relevant consequence of a fire are ZERO. And the implication of this barrier is the top of mind consequences of fire are simply not perceived as severe or likely enough to warrant action.

10.3. I can't necessarily prevent it

Many people view fire as an accident caused by things outside their control or moments of carelessness or stupidity. If fire is an accident, it is therefore not preventable.

“A lot of the time a fire is just an accident, whereas you choose to get behind the wheel...”

(Male Metro Maori)

The implication of this finding is that people need to be shown that the more preventative action they take, the less likely they are to fall victim to “accidental” fire. There is a quote by golfer Arnold Palmer that is relevant here. At a post match press conference a reporter indicated to him that he had been very lucky on the day to score so well, to which he replied “you know it’s funny, the harder I practice, the luckier I get”.

10.4. Consciousness

“It’s tricky because fire safety isn’t something you think about at the forefront of your mind...”

(Male Rural European)

Because the perceived likelihood of fire is minimal, perceived consequences are not significant and the fact that fires are seen as accidental means that fire safety is not:

- Top of mind
- At the time it is most needed

Fire safety is not top of mind for most and therefore many tend to become complacent and forget fire safe behaviours. E.g. changing batteries on smoke alarms or turning off appliances. In short, in the absence of any belief they will be significantly affected by fire, there is no reason to give the topic a place of prominence in ones mind.

“You just get blasé about it”

(Male Rural Euro)

The less top of mind a behaviour, the more frequently people need to be reminded of appropriate actions. The implication of this is that different messages, at different times and places are needed to bring fire safety top of mind at the times when and where specific actions are needed.

10.5. Perceived cost of fire safety: Time and money

Being fire safe can take time and cost money, and even though we would normally view these costs as negligible, especially when compared to the cost of an actual fire, the perceived costs outweigh the perceived risks. Buying alarm batteries and fire extinguishers can be a financial burden on some of the lower socio-economic groups, while most people live hectic lifestyles, continually juggling essential vs. optional tasks.

“I don’t deem it to be a big enough risk”

(Male Rural Euro)

Groups like Pacific People, Maori, flatters and the elderly often have limited resources and smoke alarms and their associated upkeep can be seen as an unnecessary financial expense. These groups are often highly aware of the cost of each item and the number of smoke alarms they would need in order to make their homes fully fire safe. However, in their financial situation every dollar is accounted for and as fire is seen as unlikely, resources go towards other things. Some people mentioned that there are services available in the community that assist by providing fire alarms, but awareness of such services is limited and generally require a time investment to get it sorted out.

“...the problem is the small amount of PI that know about financial assistance. Polynesians in general put fire safety on the back burner, until it happens to you. There are so many other things in life that they have to deal with...”

(Female, Pacific Rural)

Fire safety is not a priority for most, particularly as these behaviours appear to take up time that at risk groups feel they just do not have. Given the low perceived risk of fire, fire safe behaviours get pushed even further down on the list of things requiring people’s attention.

For the elderly buying batteries or having to get people in to install and change batteries may be a financial and physical cost too. Particularly for those who are living alone and have no relatives nearby, extra hurdles exist for these actions. Sometimes, asking for help can also be a barrier for the elderly. An opportunity exists here to involve the local fire brigade in helping the elderly in the community in checking the fire safety of their homes. A door to door service will certainly help those elderly who find it difficult to safeguard their home or seek help from others.

“I think for me its prioritising. I’ve been putting off sweeping the chimney and also replacing the chimney... in the end finance was a problem”

(Female Pacific Rural)

One could argue that certain fire safety behaviours can even come at a cost to your sanity, as illustrated below.....

“I have a confession. I take the batteries out of the smoke alarms because it makes such a noise when I am cooking and I always forget to put them back in...”

(Female Pacific Rural)

The implication of the perceived cost barrier is that people who are financially and time disadvantaged are likely to view certain fire safety practices as an unwarranted expense. There are at least two ways to overcome this barrier: Demonstrate that the cost of action is far less than the cost of falling victim to a fire; and by communicating any community services that will offer to help provide smoke alarms, provide installation or services to check the order of existing alarms.

10.6. Lack of knowledge/education

Another barrier to a fire safe lifestyle is a lack of knowledge/education, both real and perceived. For example, one respondent indicated that she had no idea water should not be used on oil/kitchen fires.

For some parents, their children appear to be better equipped with knowledge than they are. Children learn fire safety in schools and sometimes have homework. The children show their homework to their parents and getting them involved is like a family learning exercise, a re-education of the educated. This is an engaging route for educating parents and the New Zealand Fire Service should continue efforts with children to encourage change in the household.

There is also evidence that few people are aware or have visited the www.fire.org website. The website has many useful resources that people could learn from, for example the exit plan activity, however, few have ever searched about fire safety online. Routes to encourage people to go online could include incentives such as competitions or discounts, or encouragement through the offering of games for children.

But if a decision is made to try and push people to the website it needs to ensure that it delivers the right information for the at risk groups seeking it, in a manner that is easy to find.

As we progressed through the focus group discussions it was obvious many people were learning new things they did not know about fire and fire safety from others. It was apparent the discussions themselves were enlightening for many as it is not a topic frequently visited in their daily lives. Through local community groups, there may exist the opportunity to encourage the discussion of fire safety with visits from local firemen to the group meetings and this may be an especially relevant route for Pacific groups and the elderly.

As previously stated, fires are also seen as accidents rather than consequences of actions/inaction.

Samuel Johnson's famous quote, ***"the next best thing to knowing something, is knowing where to find it"***, but for our at risk groups they do not know where to turn. There is a need to promote information sources starting with the web address, but extending to sources for other at risk groups. For example the elderly are more likely to read the local newspaper for information than search the internet, therefore fire safety information should also have a presence in local newspapers and other media.

The implication of poor knowledge and awareness of information sources is that even if the New Zealand Fire Service is able to bring fire safety more into the consciousness of the at risk groups, there are few avenues they are aware of to seek information. So, some effort is needed to inform these groups of sources of information should they want it.

10.7. Lack of ownership (of the possessions or the issue!)

There are a number of behaviours and attitudes which fall under the heading of “lack of ownership”. For example, flatters and renters have an ‘it’s not my property’ attitude. For flatters the most they stand to lose is personal possessions, such as clothes and furniture, however their concern does not necessarily extend towards the house itself.

Young flatters often do not wish to appear to be the ‘nag’ of the house by trying to encourage others to be fire safe. As with other ‘responsible’ behaviours in a flatting situation, some participants feel uncomfortable telling others in the flat what to do. In an attempt to avoid confrontation, some would rather stay quiet and allow unsafe behaviours.

For the young flatters, messages are needed to reinforce that they put their own life and their possessions at risk by saying nothing and allowing others to act in an unsafe manner.

The New Zealand Fire Service could also encourage landlords to provide smoke alarms to tenants, using both “responsible landlord” and “asset protection” messages. Landlords are required to lodge bonds with the Department of Building and Housing, and this may provide a channel to efficiently communicate to landlords each time tenants change.

“[we have] no smoke alarms but I am renting, it’s an old house and the landlord probably hasn’t thought of it...”

(Male Maori Rural)

The core issue here is one of responsibility and encouraging people to take ownership of the fire safety issue.

11.0 Overcoming Barriers

We have identified 3 key actions in order to overcome barriers as described in the previous sections.

These are:

1. Making it real;
2. Appropriate interventions; and
3. Constant varied and relevant reminders.

11.1. *Making It Real*

In this section of the report we deal with aspects of making fire “real” to people.

11.1.1 *What is real?*

Real has two core dimensions, first is an understanding that fire could happen to “people like you”. The second dimension is depicting consequences that are relevant, significant and believable. These two dimensions form the heart of the problem when it comes to people not being as active as they should in fire safety. People simply do not believe that fire will happen to them and that if a fire should strike, it will lack major long term consequences.

11.1.1.1 *Personal relevance*

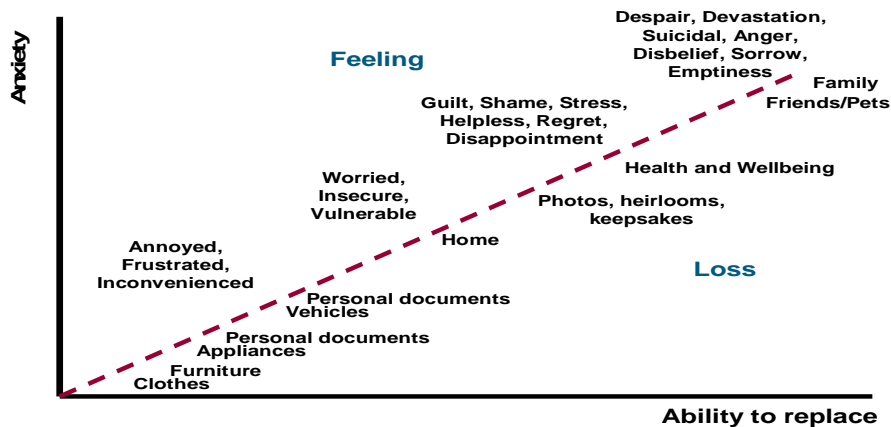
Personal relevance is the first critical message to encourage fire safe behaviour. If an individual does not think fire can happen to them, they will be unlikely to take positive actions to prevent fire and regularly consider the impact of their everyday actions on the likelihood of fire. One of the only ways that the New Zealand Fire Service can impress upon people that fire does not discriminate is to illustrate how fire has impacted the full range of society, and somehow find statistics that illustrate the likelihood of being impacted by fire is high, eg:

- 1 in x people will experience a significant unintentional fire over the course of their life
- “x” people lost their life to fire in the past “y” years – but more than “ZZ” are still living with the after effects of fire

Groups like the elderly and well-off are least likely to believe that fire will impact them, so this is the first obstacle that must be addressed with these groups. Showing real people from these cohorts and the impacts that fire has had on their lives could help to make fire more personally relevant to these groups.

11.1.1.2 Significant consequences

The second dimension in ensuring fire safe behaviours within at risk groups is communicating **significant yet relevant and believable consequences** that can motivate a change. The graph below illustrates different consequences of fire that people could experience – essentially it lists all the types of things people could lose in a fire and how such loss would make people feel. The illustration shows that as the object becomes more difficult to replace the degree of anxiety experience also increases.



The feelings and emotions increase in intensity as the things of importance become more irreplaceable. The sense of loss is tied into these feelings and the more irreplaceable the item the longer the grieving process. It's also important to note people distinguish between the loss of possessions and loss of life. An obvious divide exists here and the emotions tied to loss of life are, for some, incomprehensible. Understanding these expressions of loss means that communications can have more impact through conveying the emotional consequence to people and helping them to connect to the feelings of loss.

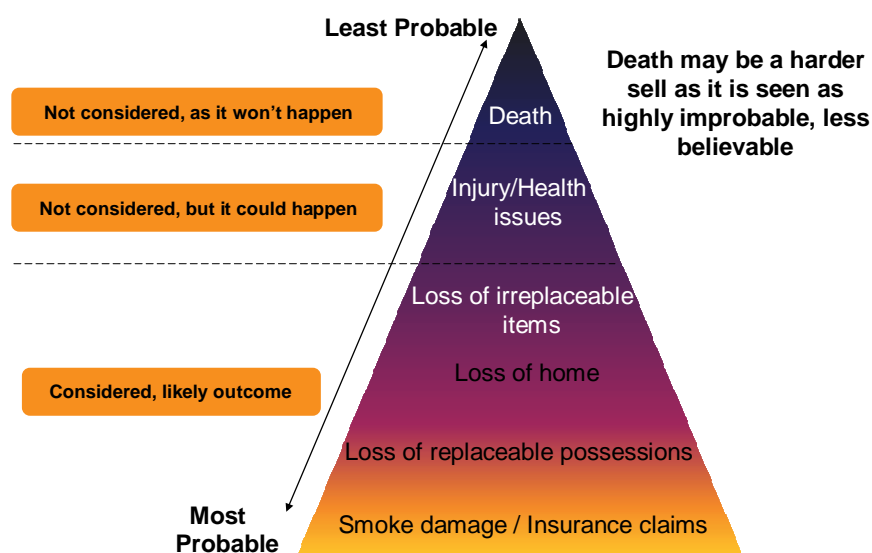
People seldom sit down and think about how they would feel if they lost the things they treasure. They need to be prompted to do so or else the threat of losing these things will have little impact.

“I have never actually thought about the consequences of a fire. Sitting down and thinking about them is actually quite powerful”

(Female Pacific Rural)

11.1.1.3 Relevant and believable consequences

Communicating consequences of fire that are believable and relevant are critical in motivating at risk groups to modify their behaviours. The diagram below illustrates people's perceptions of what would be the worst "consequences" of a fire (as discussed above) and the perceived likelihood that these consequences would actually happen.



Death is naturally considered the worst consequence of a fire, however it is also considered the least probable consequence. As mentioned earlier, most people believe that they would be alerted by the fire early enough to get out of the house alive.

Given the attitude towards the likelihood of death, it may be harder for many people to accept communications messages that solely focus on death as an outcome. The message becomes neither believable nor relevant if it is seen as an unlikely consequence. (**Note**, we are not saying that using death as a consequence of fire should be avoided. But we do recommend looking at other potential consequences of fires, and more importantly the longer lasting impacts of fire as tools to motivate a change in at risk groups' behaviour).

Injury to ones self, others and health issues related to the fire are still considered some of the worst consequences of a fire and are perceived as being much more likely to happen than death. Injury to self is particularly relevant for those who are the guardians of their households, who feel they may try to put out the fire and in the process get burnt or suffer smoke inhalation.

Given that these consequences are conceivable and have high impact, it could be a key avenue for communications with at risk groups, as people will be more receptive and believing of these outcomes.

11.1.1.4 The impact of time

When people think of fire and the effects of a fire, they naturally focus on the event and the time immediately after the fire. However, the consequences of fire are not a point in time and their full impact is not always felt immediately after a fire event.

People imagine that a common feeling at the time of even the most disastrous fire is “relief”. When imagining a house fire, people speak about how they and their household members “all got out alive”, and relief was the immediate feeling. At this stage it is about survival over saving the things that they own.

“I would just feel relieved and happy that me and my family were alive. We can replace all the other things. They don’t matter.”

(Female, European Metro)

“I’m pretty annoyed but I’m not devastated about losing my house, I’m just glad we’re safe.”

(Female, European Metro)

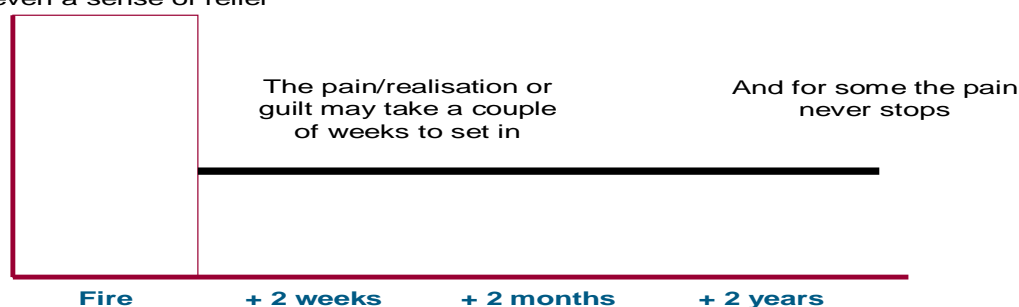
At the time of the fire, people imagine the impact that the loss of their possessions will have on their life as a distant and small consequence compared to the feeling of relief that they got out alive.

However, when prompted by drawing people’s attention to a variety of points in time after the fire they start to realise the true long lasting impact of the fire.

“A couple of weeks later, I start to get really worried about money troubles... just in terms of the house because we are not insured. And it is designed for my mum to help my grandma. I have a sick feeling in my stomach and I feel helpless and useless.”

(Male, Pacific Metro)

Around the time of the fire we feel **shock, numbness**, even after significant loss, for some, even a sense of relief



Implication: Focusing some of the communications at the longer term consequences of fire may be more motivating for groups in the community

Exploring feelings and emotions at later points in time opens up a different range of intense emotion that can have an impact upon people and can be used to motivate a change in behaviour.

11.1.1.5 The emotion behind the consequence

It is important to note that the tangible consequences of a fire are not necessarily motivators and communicating these will not necessarily lead to changes in attitudes and behaviours. Yes there may be loss of life or possession and yes you may be devastated at the time of the fire – but how do those emotions play out over time and how can those emotions be used to trigger changes in behaviour?

For example, disfigurement and the health impacts of smoke inhalation are seen as the most likely and believable serious consequences of fire and can be leveraged to motivate behavioural change. These consequences are perceived to impact all facets of people's lives: The way they are treated by others or the rehabilitation that may hinder their normal activity.

Despite claiming otherwise, many people really do care what others think and this may be heightened in more collective societies. The "judgment" of others (senior members of the group or other respected parties) can be a powerful motivator towards acting in a more socially responsible way. One's sense of position and pride can be closely linked to the approval of members of the community.

Below is a list of some of the results of fire that people have indicated are significant and relevant. Underneath the tangible result of fire are some ideas of what that consequence could mean for the person/household suffering the event, both impacts and feelings.

Death of Self:

- Grief of your family/children and you being responsible for their pain
- Not being able to provide for your family and community and the ongoing hardship that that can cause
- Support - not able to be there for the family/community in tough times
- Sharing - not being there to share life's milestone with children and families special moments

Death of Others:

- Initial shock, disbelief and grief
- Long term guilt and memories of them dying, and knowing you were responsible
- Ongoing grief – that person missing out on a full happy and successful life (we all have dreams for our children), them no longer being part of your life
- Blame from others, especially partners (relationship breakdowns) and other members of the family
- Loss of mana/ respect in the community, your action or inaction leading to the fire or severity of the fire

Disfigurement of self – for youth:

- Loss of sexual attractiveness/appeal
- Loss of physical ability/ sporting/ adventure and just general ability to participate in everyday activities
- Ostracism, being left out of the friend set activities
- Loss of employment opportunities/ potentially being discriminated against

Disfigurement of self – for others;

- Loss of income/ unable to provide, leading to hardship in the family group
- Embarrassment to others (for example, children embarrassed of parents appearance, friends not wanting to go to the clubs with you)

Disfigurement of others;

- Blame by the person/others in the social network
- Guilt

Loss of Personal Health;

- Unable to provide for the family
- Unable to provide for the extended family (Pacific People)
 - Loss of respect amongst community
 - Embarrassment at having to ask the community to help/being a burden on the family/community

Loss of Others Health;

- Burden of caring
- Guilt/blame

“Everyone was thinking who’s the friggin Muppet who started the fire...I felt like an inconvenience and was so embarrassed.”

(Male, Maori Urban)

“...the guilt and shame I felt, having people know it was my fault.”

(Female, Pacific Rural)

“People thought I was stupid for having a faulty iron like that.”

(Female, Metro Elderly)

“I feel shattered and guilty that maybe it was my fault. Our contents are not insured. Starting from scratch would ruin us.”

(Female, Pacific Rural)

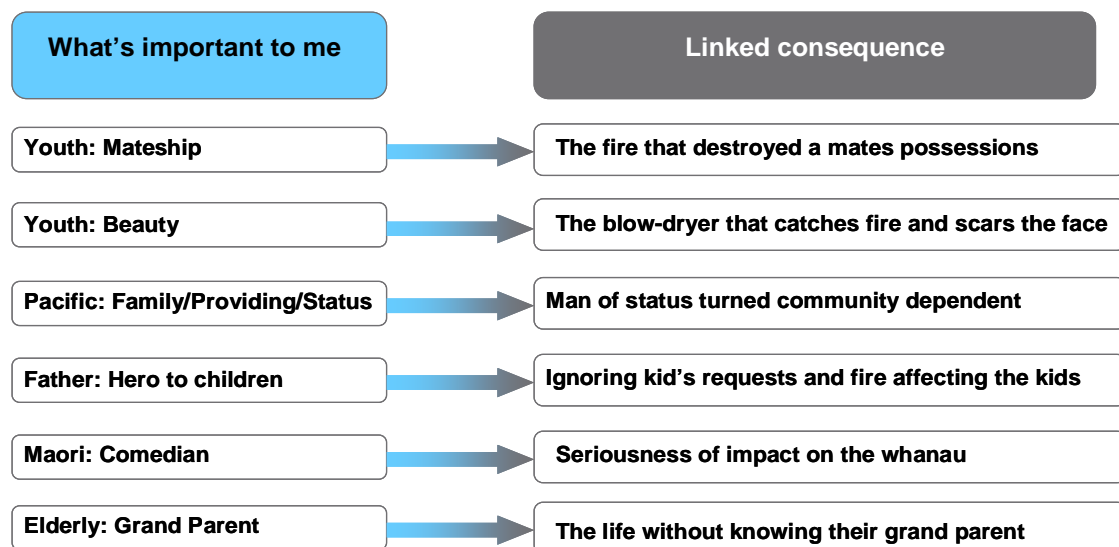
“I thought about my flatmates belongings and what I had inflicted upon them. I was horrifically guilty knowing I had caused it.”

(Male, European Metro)

11.1.1.6 Linking consequences to what's important to an individual

Making it real is also about linking what is important to groups with the consequences of a fire. For example, if beauty is important, then any negative consequence related to beauty will feel more relevant and motivating, that is fire can lead to disfigurement that can lead to lack of attractiveness to the opposite sex.

Linking the consequences of fire to the removal of something important to an individual makes the idea of a fire seem more real, relevant and serious, and elevates the importance of being more fire conscious.



The implication of linking consequences to what's important to people is that messages become less generic and more targeted in nature. They play to emotive themes that are highly relevant to specific groups. But in reality, different messages will ultimately motivate different types of people.

11.1.1.7 How about positive messages?

There are many positive messages that can be communicated to encourage fire safety on top of those demonstrating real and significant consequences of failing to be fire safe.

For example messages of **responsibility** for others in your care, **peace of mind**, **empowerment** and **taking control** are all underlying themes that people can relate to and all provide different vehicles to communicate to the at risk groups.

For some people being the ‘provider and protector for the family’ is a role that they take great pride and diligence in. Communicating that being responsible for fire safety is part of being the provider and protector of the household, can encourage individuals to be more fire safe. For Maori and Pacific People in particular, protection can extend to the community as well as immediate and extended family. This wider sphere of inclusion adds to the weight of “responsibility” as there are more people considered to be relying upon them.

Another positive motivator for people is the feeling of self satisfaction, that they have done the right and responsible thing by being more fire safe. Whereas the above “responsibility” focuses on an action essential for the well-being of other people, the sense here is more about a feeling of self recognition, being in control and in making a conscious and intelligent choice to be fire safe.

Empowerment is a third positive feeling that can be used to leverage fire safe behaviours. This involves identifying risk areas that can seem ‘unpredictable’ and dangerous and taking steps to remove danger. For the elderly, feelings of empowerment can be important especially at a lifestage where they are physically less able to take care of themselves or may have lost a partner who previously would take responsibility for this. The lower socio-economic groups may also be open to such messages as they are less likely to be insured. Fire safe behaviour can in some ways be seen as a form of insurance.

Peace of mind and having a personal sense of security can also be used to overcome barriers. Peace of mind is about not having to worry about the risks of fire (especially for elderly, linked to health outcomes). This motivator also relates to parents, especially those with younger children, as safety overall in the household is a concern for them. Bringing to the forefront the ease to take preventable fire safe actions for peace of mind may be highly motivating. Expressions of peace of mind should be utilised in communications for parents and the elderly in particular.

11.2 Appropriate Interventions

There is an argument that people are bombarded with so many messages that they become selective to messages that they “invite in”. Messages that reinforce our beliefs are more likely than others to be accepted.

There are however, natural times in our lives where our points of view are re-evaluated and where we are more open to messages that contradict our current beliefs than usual. By trying to connect with target groups at times where they re-evaluate their priorities, the New Zealand Fire Service may stand a better chance of a successful long term outcome.

11.2.1 So when are these re-evaluation points?

Many re-evaluation points sit within significant turning points or changes in life stage. Below are outlined key life stages where people may be more open to messages about changing entrenched behaviours. Each stage involves a shift in responsibility and a time of reflecting on priorities. These stages are: School years, Moving out of home, First home buyers, Having children, Retirement and Death of a partner.



School years

- Most receptive
- Ability to educate a new generation of thinking/behaviour



Moving out of home

- Step of independence
- Taking on responsibilities



First home buyers

- Key milestone, symbol of financial achievements
- Major investment of high importance



Having children

- Shift in attitude, becoming responsible for someone else
- Higher awareness of safety overall



First grandchildren

- Re-evaluation of safety around the home
- Protective instinct



Retirement

- Financial security more crucial
- More spare time & change in lifestyle



Death of partner

- Feeling vulnerable
- Huge adjustment to lifestyle

Partnering with organisations that deal with people at these different life stages could provide the New Zealand Fire Service the opportunity to intervene at points where we know people are more open to messages of this nature.

At each of these stages we need to ask ourselves what organisations or agencies can we partner with? The organisations must be relevant to what is happening to people at those stages, organisations that they would naturally be in touch with during the process of shifting to these stages. For example, first home buyers will be in touch with banks and insurance companies, new mums will be in touch with organisations such as Plunket or midwives. Working together with these organisations may help in the delivery of messages that feel more relevant and advice driven, rather than what people feel to be the constant barrage of messages in mass media telling them how they should live their lives.



11.2.2 Other Interventions

Apart from intervening at key life stages there are also other points of intervention where people may be more receptive to change. For example, placing emphasis on communicating to the local community when fires have occurred can bring greater awareness that fires can happen to anybody in all communities. The current news within the community about the fire and the physical evidence of it in the neighbourhood can have a strong impact upon those who feel that fires never happen in their areas. This is a great time to prompt on the fire safe actions people can take and encourage discussion within the community.

Church is another point of intervention, particularly for Pacific People who are open to messages from pastors/ministers/priests as respected leaders in the community. It is also important to engage those in Church groups, for example, youth groups, as in doing so the message is able to reach all the different age groups within the Church community. Highlighting fire safety in the Church environment can also encourage discussion about the topic. Pacific People feel that discussion of fire safety really helps them think about it and bring attention to it in a way that they haven't done before. An opportunity exists for the New Zealand Fire Service to work in conjunction with Church leaders to promote fire safe behaviours especially within the Pacific People communities.

A place of intervention for Maori is the Marae although this is more so for Rural Maori where attendance at the Marae is more frequent. Maori are more open to and respect guidance from kaumatua and kuia, as well as other people from the Marae and this helps provide a sense of community. Much like the Church for Pacific People, the Marae offers an opportunity for discussion and a forum for learning about fire safety.

When people first move to rural areas they are more open to information about the community and fire related information for living rurally (for example, distance of fire station, availability of fire hydrants). Some new arrivals can feel vulnerable in a new area, particularly those who have moved from more populated areas to rural homes.

The beginning of winter, especially for rural areas, also provides another point of intervention as most of them have fire places. Many rural participants consider their fireplaces a fire hazard. The fact that some use theirs on a 24 hour basis means the beginning of winter is a key time to check fire safety around the home, particularly the chimney flume. Reminders for this kind of fire safe check up would work well in this season.

11.3 Constant Relevant and Varied Reminders

One of the most important findings of this research is that different people will have different triggers when it comes to being fire safe.

It is therefore important to “cover the bases” and deliver different messages at different times to cast the net as wide as possible. Constantly pushing one message or one theme and tone will effectively reach people of a particular disposition, but will be unlikely to reach many others not open to that particular angle.

Constant reminders means using lots of different messages at different times and places in order to overcome apathy, but also the use of different positive and negative messages and with varied emotive themes.

The key to accessing at risk groups is providing them with relevant and varied messages that elevate fire safety in people’s minds, especially at times when they can do something about it. As we mentioned earlier, fridge magnets are a prime example of communications that can be used as reminders within the home. These messages can be tied in with other communications in order to reinforce the communications they encounter outside of the situation.



12.0 The Role of Children for All Groups

What you do with children now will dictate the shape of fire safety in 20 years from now. Building in knowledge about fire safety and reinforcing their importance will help set the standard for their future behaviour as adults and role models. A lot of household behaviour change is also driven by children introducing ideas at home.

Many of the groups, especially those with children or grandchildren could recall fire safety messages or behaviours that the children brought home. This sparks discussion in the family and gives a timely reminder to parents/grandparents about the importance of fire safety. As we have seen in the past with children in cars, children are quick to point out the faults of their elders. In some cases children get their parents involved in homework activities, this is especially true of 'exit plans' where parents have been involved in helping their child draw this up. It is important for the New Zealand Fire Service to continue concentrating efforts on the younger generations as they can not only influence their elders now, but will influence children in the future.

“My kids were doing it at school and started telling us about it. It tends to come from the kids. They get really passionate about it and have homework about it”

(Male Urban European)

“... the little ones, they like to drop and roll... learn it at school...”

(Female Pacific Metro)

“I think they get taught a lot at pre-schools, they come home with pamphlets... safety first is what they are taught...”

(Female Maori Rural)

“... my 3 year old (grandchild) says to me when we are talking about fire, Nana Cushla! Hit the floor! He had it all down pat.”

(Female Elderly Rural)

“Anything that involves kids... cos parents tend to get involved in what their children are doing... If it wasn't for bringing stuff home from school and sitting down with my son Jacob and saying okay this where you need to get out...”

(Female Pacific Rural)

13.0 Appendices

13.1 Appendix 1 – Collages

Participants were all asked to complete collages as part of their pre-group homework. They were asked to show us what are the most important things in their lives and how it would feel to lose those things. The following are a few of the collages we selected to show you their illustrations.



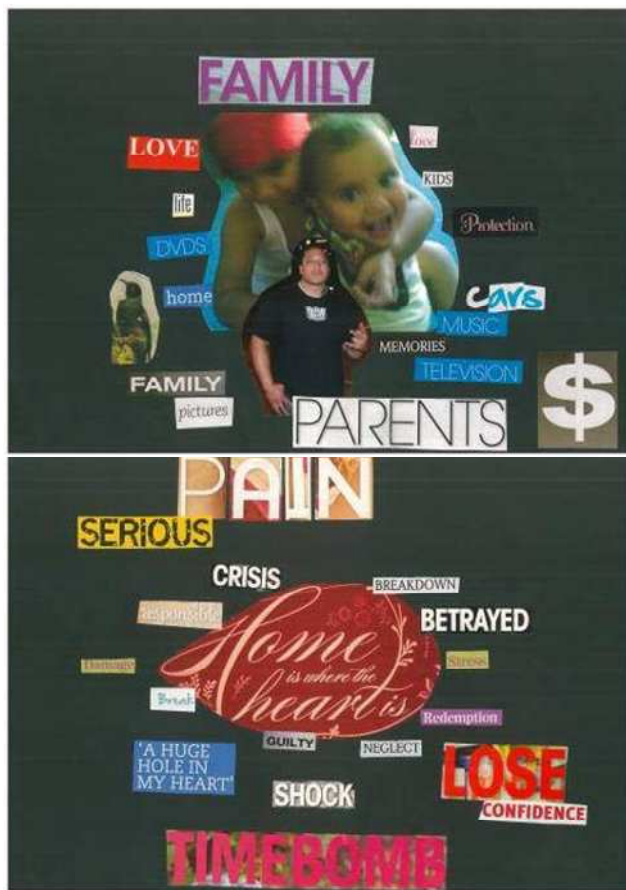
"...Family are the most important, to an islander your family is everybody including your neighbours. My faith and my relationship with God is important to me. Holidays, hotels and travel creates memories. For me that's all I have left are the memories of the things we did together. It's about putting aside the time to do things with the ones you love to build a memory. Don't put off life enjoy the little things like your food and your garden. Life is for living. Education is important too... I would feel shattered if I lost my house that's why I'm insured. You will have grief, when my husband died I realized all of a sudden my possessions had no meaning, I realized if I could have anything again I would rather have him. You feel depression over the things that are out of control. Probably for me it would just be brokenness, a loss – shattered. I can identify with all those words that are descriptive of pain..."

(Female, Pacific Rural)



"Family is the most important thing but also your friends, pets, home and your hobbies like gardening. When I think of family I think of security, friendship and safety, of photos and events like birthday parties. When you lose someone you go through all sorts of stages... anger, guilt, frustration and desperation and there is nothing you can do. My son was 11 when he died of a brain tumor. I asked all sorts of questions. You ask all of these questions, its always someone else's fault and then its your fault. Did I feed him something wrong? The pain you feel is actually physical pain. You never get over it."

(Female Elderly Rural)



- *"The most important thing to me is my kids, love and protecting them. My parents are also very important to me as I am emotionally bound to them. Your family pictures are so important because they are your memories. Other things are important but not as important are things like my music, DVDs and TV. I would feel responsible if my children died... guilt.. Basically a huge hole in my heart. I would also feel responsible for losing things like family photos of my dad as he doesn't have many pictures of himself as a child and I would feel so guilty for losing them. The feelings you have when losing people would be totally different to losing material things. Obviously you would be a lot more upset if you lost your family than your play station. I would feel so lonely, lost and empty if I lost my family but I would just be bummed and angry if I lost my car."*

(Female Maori Urban)



“...Family, love, happiness and my health are really important to me, so are my friends because they’re like family too. Money is important because it’s what you need to survive and work provides that money. I’m a provider for my family so my job is really important so we can have the money to pay off the mortgage. Also your photos are important they are like your memories of your life.... If I lost my family I would feel devastation and depression. Like self destruction and having dark moments. Even suicidal sometimes I reckon, if you lost something that close to you. It would be like a nightmare that you would want to forget. Nothing could prepare you for it and you would feel empty...”

(Male, Pacific Metro)



“...My dogs are important to me. My actual house itself, I’d be pretty gutted if I had no house anymore. For me it starts with the living things, e.g. children and pets and then on to the other stuff. These things are irreplaceable, you can’t replace your kids, pets or photos. I suppose if I lost all of that my actual sense of self would be pretty in the air, a lot of who I am is tied up in these things. You might even want to kill yourself. It’s a long unwelcoming road, there’s a long way to go just cos you’ve lost everything you still have to head on and then most of my other images are about being alone, distraught that sort of thing. One of a burnt out house is just no second chance. I suppose the main thing thinking about fire, the things it takes away from you are those irreplaceable things...”

(Male, European Metro)



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