

PUBLIC EDUCATION PROJECT 1

Where there's smoke, there's fire.

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Abstract

The City of Paterson, New Jersey is a place that once was the heart of the Industrial Revolution. Known as the “Silk City”, it was the first planned industrial city in the United States. Textile mills were built around the seventy seven foot high Great Falls, which was used for its hydroelectric power. The mass exodus of the manufacturing industry, in particular the silk mills, has sent the City into a downward spiral. The instance of shootings, abandoned buildings, drug activity and building fires are on the rise. With this rise in fires brings a rise in fire deaths. Multiple fatality fires are also becoming an annual occurrence. The constant appears to be a lack of functioning smoke detectors. This analysis will focus on the demographics of and facts about the City of Paterson, New Jersey. There will also be a statistical breakdown of the activities of the Paterson Fire Department showing trends in death and lack of smoke detectors.

Analysis

The City of Paterson, New Jersey is located in the Northern section of the State. It is home to 146,427 people in 8.22 square miles (US Census Bureau, 2010). With a population density of 17,347 per square mile, it makes Paterson the second most densely populated city in the U.S. when compared to those with populations of 100,000 or more (US Census Bureau, 2010). Paterson is the County Seat of Passaic County. There is a Level 1 Trauma Center and the Robert Roe Federal Building. Fifty one high rise buildings dot the landscape and Old Law tenements are common to see throughout the city. Abandoned and/or converted mills provide a glimpse into Paterson's importance to the growth of the nation. The most common structures to find are 2 ½ and 3 ½ story wood frame multiple dwellings with minimal distance between them. Another common construction feature is asphalt siding, which is known throughout the area to exacerbate fire travel from building to building.

The Paterson Fire Department is staffed with 350 personnel. Line personnel work twenty four hours on and seventy two hours off. There are seven Fire Stations operating twenty three apparatus. The types of apparatus are seven Engine Companies, three Ladder Companies, a Heavy Rescue Squad, five BLS Ambulances with an EMS Supervisor, four Chiefs Cars, an Arson Investigator and an Air Cascade Unit. The Department handles all NFPA 1670 Technical Rescue incidents locally and is the regional responder for building collapse.¹

In 2011 the Department handled 35,000 emergency calls for service. Response time was within 4 minutes over ninety percent of the time. There were 310 working fires and 7,035 fire calls. Fires in residential dwellings encompassed the majority of fires at 85%. From 2009-2011

¹ All Fire Department information retrieved from PFD official records.

there were 15 fatalities and an unknown amount of civilian injuries as a result of building fires. There were 4 multiple fatality fires over this same period of time. The common thread between all of the multi-fatal fires was no early detection in place and/or operating.² According to NFPA, almost two-thirds of home fire deaths in 2005-2009 resulted from fires in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms.

The Paterson Fire Department, Bureau of Fire Prevention handles all of the smoke detector inspections and issuance citywide. In 2011 there were 1,027 smoke detector inspections performed in the city. Of those inspections, there were 275 system failures and 195 system corrections. In this same period the Fire Official cited 90 Imminent Hazard; Order to Abate/Evacuate due to a lack of functioning systems in multiple family dwellings.³

The Bureau also subscribes to "Operation 7 Save-A-Life" which is a cooperative between the NJ Division of Fire Safety and Channel 7 News. This program has given thousands of free smoke detectors to the City of Paterson for issuance to City residents. In 2011, 350 smoke detectors were given to the Fire Prevention Bureau and 270 were given out to the public. Even with the inspections and free detector issuance, buildings with absent or non-functional detectors are all too common to find.⁴

Company Commanders often refer these conditions for handling by the Bureau. The commonly reported issues are vandalism and lack of maintenance. The Fire Bureau is charged with following up on these complaints. Their task is to identify the deficiency and order it

² All Fire Department information retrieved from PFD official records.

³ All Fire Prevention information retrieved from Fire Prevention Bureau.

⁴ All Fire Prevention information retrieved from Fire Prevention Bureau.

corrected and/or issue free smoke detectors for installation along with providing instructions for installation.

References

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