



# Seattle Fire Department Fire Prevention Report

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## *Community Fire Safety Advocate Pilot Project*

### *Executive Summary*

The Seattle Fire Department's Community Fire Safety Advocate program was developed in response to a fatality house fire which occurred in the Fremont neighborhood on June 12, 2010. Four children and a young woman were the victims of this fire, which was Seattle's deadliest in more than 30 years. Both the local community and Fire Department members were greatly impacted by the tragedy of the event.

Many in Seattle's East African communities were affected when it was learned that the fire victims were first and second generation Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees. East African community leaders came forward to express their concern about the need for more fire safety education in their communities. It was clear to the Fire Department that more outreach and education was needed to better reach immigrant and refugee communities with important life-saving messages.



*CFSA Mohammed Webo at an outreach event*

Shortly after the fire, Seattle Fire Department leadership met with East African community leaders to develop a strategy to successfully conduct fire safety education within the community. Interest in directly training native language speakers to conduct fire safety education within the community was highlighted. The resulting Community Fire Safety Advocate (CFSA) program became the primary Fire Department educational vehicle for this endeavor. With direct assistance from East African community leaders, individuals were selected who had standing within Seattle's East African community and who demonstrated a commitment to the larger population. They represented all four major East African language groups (Amharic, Oromo, Somali, Tigrinya). These individuals underwent an intensive, Fire Department-led training on fire safety and community outreach, as well as assisted in the development of culturally relevant fire safety materials.

After receiving training, and with ongoing support from Fire Department members, the newly-trained CFSA's conducted a variety of outreach activities over a three month pilot period. These included kitchen table discussions, small group meetings, community workshops and a fire station open house. Between



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September—December 2010, more than 1,300 members of Seattle’s East African community were reached with important fire safety and prevention messages.

Given the tight time frame needed to develop and conduct the initial pilot program, a thorough evaluation of the message efficacy was not possible. However, measurements conducted did indicate significant knowledge gain and skill development among the Community Fire Safety Advocates by the conclusion of their training. Additionally, knowledge gain amongst program participants on a limited number of fire safety topics was surveyed, with over 95% indicating a positive knowledge gain. More in-depth evaluation of program outcomes should be incorporated if the program is continued.

Numerous individuals and agency partnerships were critical to the pilot program’s success. The leadership of the Seattle Fire Department not only supported and provided resources for the project, but actively participated in the relationship building and outreach events that were vital to the program’s success. The Fire Prevention Division oversaw the project’s development and implementation through its Public Education Section staff. The community leaders who donated their time and insight into the project’s genesis ensured it was developed to meet the needs of a diverse East African community. A large number of community agencies and organizations assisted in hosting and promoting events, providing resources, and offering existing connections. And finally, the five Community Fire Safety Advocates demonstrated a strong willingness to learn the fire safety information and skills, to assist in the development of culturally relevant instructional materials, and to reach out with their new found knowledge to others in the community.

### ***Program Description***

#### **Program Background**

On June 12, 2010 an apartment fire in Seattle’s Fremont neighborhood took the lives of five individuals. The victims included four children--two girls ages 5 and 7, two boys ages 5 and 14--and a 21-year-old woman. The fire was started by a foam mattress placed too close to a light bulb in a closet. The victims were all members of an East African family. Several thousand attended a memorial service held at Seattle Center. It is from this tragedy that the East African Community Fire Safety Advocate project was born.

The approximately 6,000 East Africans in Seattle primarily have roots in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. These are the communities fire safety outreach efforts targeted between September and December 2010. While many East Africans speak English and were born in the United States, others struggle with learning the language and customs when landing in an unfamiliar place. As with most immigrant and refugee experiences, language and cultural barriers often prevent access to information and services. These barriers can deny someone from knowing and understanding the common



*CFSA Maymuna Haji-Eda Presenting to Somali group*



home fire hazards and ways to prevent and react to those dangers. The CFSA program directly addressed these key fire safety issues.

Reaching target communities requires developing relationships, understanding community concerns, and gaining trust from those communities. It also requires a commitment to providing resources for programs to develop over time. With the input of a number of East African community members and leaders, Public Education staff developed an outreach plan which focused on three main areas: (1) participate in existing community events such as fairs planned by and for East African communities, (2) develop presentations for churches, mosques and other organized groups where East African community members gather, and (3) develop a Community Fire Safety Advocate program with East African community leaders for conducting fire safety education within the communities in East African languages. These outreach efforts targeted Seattle's East African families whose native languages include Amharic, Oromo, Somali and Tigrinya.

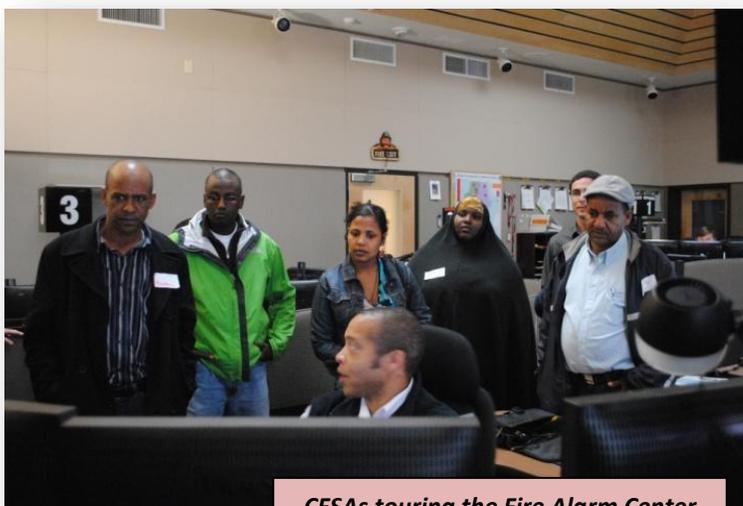
### Program Goals

- Increase home fire safety and fire prevention practices among members of the East African community.
- Expand and improve outreach to East African communities by Seattle Fire Department members.
- Build relationships between the Seattle Fire Department and East African community leaders.
- Increase the Fire Department's understanding of the needs and concerns of the East African community.
- Demonstrate to the East African community the services offered by the Seattle Fire Department.

### Program Outcomes

The following outcomes were developed for the CFSA program.

1. Develop relationships with five local organizations and agencies serving East African communities.
2. Train four-six community members on fire safety and prevention who will be able to conduct educational outreach in Amharic, Oromo, Somali, and Tigrinya.
3. Reach 1,500 East African community members with home fire safety and fire response messages between September 2010 and December 2010.



*CFSAs touring the Fire Alarm Center*

### Program Model

The pilot Community Fire Safety Advocate project trained five community members who, after completing 15 hours of training, conducted outreach and gave presentations on home fire safety and prevention to Seattle's East African community members. The five CFSAs (and their language expertise) were Ali Abdulahi (Somali), Michael Neguse (Amharic/Tigrinya), Mohammed Webo (Oromo), Maymuna Haji-Eda (Somali), and Kidane Hailu (Tigrinya).



This training/outreach project was modeled after an education approach referred to as *community lay workers*, which has a long history of providing public health services to underserved communities in many different cultures and countries. Characteristics of community lay workers are that they come from the community in which they work, have standing and trust from members of that community, speak the same language, identify and have a sense of service with the community. These factors assist in reaching a greater number of targeted and often hard-to-reach individuals. The key to this program is utilizing trainees who are both culturally and linguistically familiar with the communities being reached. Additionally, newly trained community members can then capacitate others and that knowledge stays within those communities. Creating a network of Community Fire Safety Advocates throughout the city is identified as a way to provide the Fire Department with key community contacts ready to assist as needed. These trained community members have the knowledge and ability to inform their communities while serving as links to the Fire Department.

### Community Input

A critical component of developing the CFSA program was gathering input from East African community leaders and members. Through these connections it became clear that there was a strong desire for fire education and for it to be in the learner's native language. A draft proposal of the CFSA program was shared with East African community groups and leaders and their input was incorporated into the final product.

Input acquired in focus groups also shaped the training methods and materials of the project. It was through interaction with East African community members and in-depth discussions with the CFSAs that Fire Department education staff learned about traditional home coffee roasting practices which create a lot of smoke, often causing the smoke alarm to sound. The typical response described to the sound of a beeping smoke alarm was to take it down or remove the smoke alarm battery. Developing fire safety messages that were culturally relevant to the practices of coffee roasting and use of incense were done in partnership with the CFSAs. Their input also helped us in being considerate of non-literate individuals and developing effective pictorial materials which were used by the CFSAs in the community.

Prospective CFSAs were identified with the help of local East African organizations and community leaders.

All prospective CFSA's were asked to commit to the following:

1. Be willing to receive up to 15 hours of paid training over a two week period.
2. Be able to identify at least four community groups to reach out to for presentations and other events.
3. After receiving training, dedicate up to 30 hours teaching basic fire safety and prevention to a variety of community groups. Stipends were provided to offset personal costs incurred by the CFSAs while conducting outreach.
4. Reach at least 500 individuals during the pilot project (approximately 3 months).
5. Be able to return reporting forms on a monthly basis.



*Capt. Smalls leading CFSAs training*



After identifying five community members willing to participate in the program, a training schedule was set and training activities were finalized. The five CFSA's represented the four most common East African languages of Amharic, Oromo, Somali and Tigrinya. Two of the CSFAs, a man and a woman, were Somali.

### Training

The training focused on a number of key fire safety and prevention messages and introduced the CFSA's to the main services of the Seattle Fire Department. The topics covered during the 15 hour training included the following:

- What is fire really like and why is it so dangerous?
- What are the main home fire hazards and prevention methods?
- What are the emergency services offered by the Seattle Fire Department?
- What are the proper ways to respond to a fire in your home?

The training was held over four days in September 2010. Public Education staff and uniformed personnel conducted the training. One of the highlights was a visit to the Fire Alarm Center to learn how 911 calls are received and units dispatched. The CSFAs also got to visit with firefighters at Stations 10 and 28. Those SFD members who participated in the trainings included both Prevention and Operations Division staff. A list of the key messages covered in the training can be found in *Appendix 1*.

At the conclusion of a training session, the CSFAs were asked to demonstrate key skills covered in the training. Examples of skills included showing the proper way to cover a pot with a lid or demonstrating how to check a smoke alarm and change the battery. A complete list of skills demonstrated by the CSFAs can be found in *Appendix 2*.

Visuals were used throughout the training. Both videos and laminated pictograms were tested and evaluated by the CSFAs during the training to ensure that they would be effective outside of the classroom. It became clear during the planning of this program that simply providing translated handouts was not an effective approach to fire prevention education.

To recognize the CSFAs for completing the training, a small ceremony was held at Station 6. The five CSFAs were given a certificate, a letter of introduction from Fire Chief Dean, and their



*CFSA Maymuna Haji-Eda receives her certificate from Asst. Chief Hepburn*



*CFSA Ali Abdulahi leading a small group discussion at Brighton Apartments*



outreach kits which included a satchel and the hands-on teaching materials they had helped develop during their training. See *Appendix 4* for a detailed list of kit items.

### Community Outreach Efforts

After receiving 15 hours of training, the CFSAs set off to share their newly-acquired fire safety skills with others. Most of the outreach activities were initiated by the CFSAs, who already had contacts in their communities. Public Education staff assisted with setting up a fire station open house and four fire safety workshops which brought all the CFSAs together in one venue. The format for workshops included an introduction of the program by Fire Department staff, followed by a viewing of four short video clips showing the dangers of fire, as well as some fire safety skills. Small groups were then formed by language. This format worked well at Brighton Apartments in Rainier Beach and at Seattle Housing Authority's NewHolly Campus. Unfortunately, attempts to host workshops at Rainier Beach Community Center and Yesler Community Center attracted only a few participants.

### Collaborations

This program utilized community partners to assist in setting up presentations and workshops. Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) co-sponsored two of the events. The fire safety workshop at NewHolly attracted over 80 participants and included English-as-a-Second Language students from South Seattle Community College as well as SHA and local community residents.

The following community organizations, City of Seattle departments, and individuals assisted with outreach and marketing of the pilot CFSAs project:

*African Communities Network, East African Community Services, Refugee Women's Alliance, Afrique Service Center, South Seattle Community College, Yesler Terrace Community Council, HOPE-Eritrean Social Services, Eritrean Orthodox Church Northgate, Somali Community Services of Seattle, Horn of Africa Services, Department of Neighborhoods, Seattle/King County Public Health, Seattle Red Cross International Services, Lutheran Community Services, Seattle Parks and Recreation, Lake Washington Apartments, Neighborhood House, Seattle Housing Authority community builders, Seattle Neighborhood Group, Seattle Police East African Council, Rose O'Brien (DSHS Refugee Elder Grant Coordinator).*

## Results

### Presentations

Fire safety events/activities were held at the following locations:

*Dakota Apartments, Brighton Apartments, Refugee Women's Alliance, SHA-NewHolly Gathering Center, Yesler Community Center, Rainier Beach Community Center, Ali Norah Islamic Studies, Rainier Community Center, High Point Community Center, Eritrean Church of*



**CFSAs Michel Neguse leading a small group discussion at NewHolly with Station 28.**



*North Seattle, Somali Community Services of Seattle, Fire Station 28 Open House, private homes.*

The workshops and presentations which were held at locations with pre-existing meetings or gatherings of East African community members worked very well. These are the places with regularly scheduled meetings which had a pre-established audience. The presentations held at churches or mosques and those held at already established community classes or meetings were also well attended and required less advertising effort on the part of staff and CFSAs. Additionally, the CFSAs did kitchen table meetings in families' homes. These were a great way to provide practical, specific fire safety information as well as to reach more isolated community members.

Group presentations included the viewing of video clips to illustrate the reality of fire (fast, dark, smoky and hot). The video clips also demonstrated the danger of throwing water on a grease fire and the correct way to put out a small cooking fire. The video clips appeared to be a valuable tool for establishing the dangers of fire, with an emphasis on the importance of smoke alarms and a quick response. Additionally, they provided a good visual model of fire safe behaviors.

### **Fire Station 28 Open House**

One of the highlights of the program was a Saturday Open House at Fire Station 28, located in the Rainier Valley. The idea to host an open house at this fire station came from East African community leaders. In conversations about building trust and relationship, it was suggested that the Fire Department invite the community to learn more about their neighborhood station. In their words, "invite us to visit your house".

Fire Station 28 was chosen because it is located in a neighborhood with a significant East African population. The three hour event drew over 500 visitors, over half East African community members. Publicity for the open house included a mailing, flyers, and personal contact by both Fire Department staff and CFSAs to local businesses, community groups, mosques, and churches serving East African community members. The CFSAs were present at the Open House to both talk with visitors about fire safety and to introduce them to the firefighters. This event gave the community an opportunity to learn about the Seattle Fire Department and its many services and showed the interest of immigrant/refugees communities in the Fire Department's activities. It was also the most highly attended open house event this station had experienced.



*Fire Station 28 Open House*

### **Areas for Improvement**

Two workshops, planned in cooperation with Seattle Housing Authority and Neighborhood House, at Yesler Community Center and at Rainier Beach Community Center drew only a few participants. Considerable effort



was put into advertising—including door-to-door leafleting by native language speakers. The conclusion drawn by staff was that attempting to pull disparate communities of people together for an unfamiliar or not regularly scheduled event of this sort required more planning and preparation than the time frame allowed. The workshops were quickly planned due to time constraints built into the pilot project. Future workshops should be planned well ahead of time and community partners established early on and asked to assist in promoting the event.

## Outcomes

The three month long Community Fire Safety Advocate pilot project accomplished the following:

- Five East African community members received capacity-building skills and knowledge in fire safety and prevention.
- Over 1,300 East African community members were reached with culturally relevant fire safety information.
- Community Fire Safety Advocates conducted 119 hours of outreach activity between September and December of 2010.
- The Seattle Fire Department developed ongoing relationships with nine community organizations serving East African residents.

## Evaluation

### Evaluation of Skills Training for Community Fire Safety Advocates

The measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of the CFSA training course involved both a skills-attainment demonstration by the trainee, as well as a self-assessment at the conclusion of the training.

The skills assessment for trainees was conducted at the conclusion of each training module by the instructor. The assessment involved completion of items on a checklist, such as the demonstration of a skill (ex: correct method of putting out a pan fire using a lid) or verbal description of a key fire safety message using the instructional materials provided. This was done in small groups or pairs and observed by the instructor to ensure correct fire safety messages and skills were demonstrated. Each CFSA trainee successfully completed all items on the checklist prior to moving on to the next module.

The self-assessment was conducted at the completion of the 15 hour training program. Each CFSA was asked to complete a written survey form. See *Appendix 3* for the survey and results. All trainees indicated that they would rate their level of home fire safety and prevention knowledge prior to the training as lower than at the conclusion of the training. All indicated confidence in their ability to understand the dangers of fire, identify the main causes of home fires and know how to prevent them, know what steps to take if they discover a fire at home, and to correctly describe to another how to respond to a home fire.



*CFSA Kidane Hailu at an outreach event.*



### **Evaluation of Message Retention by Presentation Attendees**

Participants in a fire safety workshop were asked to answer two questions after viewing video clips and attending a presentation by a Community Fire Safety Advocate. The questions focused on the correct method of extinguishing a pan fire and on the amount of time available for escaping from a home fire.

Of the 70 attendees who participated in the survey, all (100%) correctly identified the proper method for extinguishing a pan fire (covering with a lid). A slightly lesser number, 68 (97%) correctly answered the time to escape a fire (less than two minutes). One of the key messages for the workshops and presentations was that fire is fast, and reacting quickly to evacuate the building when hearing a smoke alarm or seeing any smoke is crucial to escaping a fire safely. These messages were depicted in the video clips and re-emphasized throughout the CFSA presentations. This message was felt by the Fire Department staff to be critical for this target group, based on the investigation results of the Fremont fire and on the information collected through the focus groups which showed a common level of misunderstanding regarding the safe response to an activated smoke alarm.

### **East African Community Response to Fire Safety Activities**

At a feedback meeting with the CFSAs at the conclusion of the pilot project, anecdotal information was gathered on their experiences delivering fire safety education. Overwhelmingly they reported being well received by the communities they reached out to and that there was a lot of interest in learning about fire safety and prevention. One CFSA reported that individuals he spoke with were very engaged and wanted this information. "Everyone said that this information was valuable".

Another reported that "Everyone thanked me for sharing this valuable information about how to be safe. They said 'May God bless you for sharing this'. The community was surprised to see how fast a fire spreads when they watched the video. Nobody could believe it".

One CFSA commented about the reaction from some who at first questioned her motive to share this education. "At first they thought I was trying to sell them something but I told them that 'no, I'm not selling anything. I'm just here to teach the community about how to be safe from fire'. After that they listened and wanted more." Said one CFSA, "I would ask everyone to tell me what they do if the smoke alarm beeps when they are roasting coffee or cooking and they all raised their hand and told me that they took out the battery so I had to explain how to fan the alarm and open windows instead of taking out the battery. They did not understand before the presentation but they understood after." Another CFSA shared that the older Eritreans he spoke with liked that they could receive this information in their native language. "The elders appreciated this information and were grateful".

While anecdotal, the comments offer a glimpse into what transpired during the outreach activities. This outreach model requires a considerable degree of trust as it is impossible for experienced staff to be at every presentation or know what information is being shared in various languages. However, by having the CFSAs demonstrate that they knew and could describe the key messages and could properly perform the fire safety skills prior to their outreach activities, the likelihood of life saving skills being passed to traditionally hard-to-reach communities was felt to be much higher than through traditional fire safety outreach methods.



## ***Conclusions and Recommendations***

A tragic house fire in June 2010 impacted an entire city, and highlighted the need for increased fire prevention outreach to Seattle’s East African community members. Over a five-month time period, Seattle Fire Department staff accomplished the following as part of a pilot outreach effort: 1) conducted a needs assessment of Seattle’s East African community regarding fire safety knowledge and practices, 2) contacted and collaborated with leaders of the local East African community to develop a jointly supported outreach approach, 3) developed a working project model, 4) developed culturally relevant training and outreach materials, 5) identified and trained five individuals proficient in the four major East African language groups as Community Fire Safety Advocates, 6) formed partnerships with agencies and organizations providing services to the East African community, 7) organized outreach events for both Fire Department and CFSA members to participate in, 8) evaluated the pilot project outreach activities, and 9) made recommendations for expansion and modification of the program model for future use with this and additional target communities.

These efforts resulted in the following outcomes:

- Five East African community members received capacity-building skills and knowledge in fire safety and prevention. Continued contracts with these individuals will allow them to serve as fire safety advocates to their communities and ambassadors to the Seattle Fire Department.
- Community Fire Safety Advocates conducted 119 hours of outreach activity between September and December of 2010.
- Over 1,300 East African community members were reached with culturally relevant fire safety information.
- Fire safety knowledge gain was documented for both the Community Fire Safety Advocates, as well as among the East African community members who engaged in their outreach events.
- The Seattle Fire Department established firm relationships with nine community organizations serving East African residents.

To build on the relationships established with this program, and to continue to reach the target population with life saving messages, resources to continue outreach contracts with the five CFSAs should be dedicated. CFSAs could be called upon on an “as-needed” basis to assist at presentations and outreach events involving East African community members. This would help maintain the CFSA’s fire prevention and outreach skills gained in 2010 while reaching even greater numbers of East African residents with fire safety education. It would also maintain important advocates for Fire Department efforts in East African communities.

The Community Fire Safety Advocate model can be used to conduct fire safety outreach to other hard to reach populations, including immigrant, refugee, and differently abled communities. Some of the largest populations of immigrants/refugees in Seattle include speakers of Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Somali.

### *Summary of Recommendations:*

- Continue to fund existing CFSAs for workshops and events involving East African communities.
- Continue fire safety and prevention outreach efforts to Seattle’s East African community.
- Refine and expand development of pictorial, video, non-literate, and culturally relevant fire safety education materials. Videos with voiceovers in various primary languages can be shared with ethnic



media outlets and larger community groups, as well as be incorporated in the Department's web-based prevention efforts.

- Expand CFSA program to other immigrant/refugee communities in Seattle, with a focus on primary language groups.
- Involve Operations Division in outreach efforts to immigrant/refugee communities.



*Community Fire Safety Advocates & Seattle Fire Department members*

