

Why It Matters

SOMETIMES IT'S GOOD FOR FIRE SAFETY EDUCATORS TO BE REMINDED THAT THEIR EFFORTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Part of working in the field of fire safety includes keeping up with fire-related news and trends. For most of us, including me, that often means inboxes and social media feeds flooded with discouraging and sometimes heartbreaking news: home fires that kill children, new attempts to legally ban home fire sprinklers, deadly wildfires sparked by careless human activity. Sometimes it's enough to make even the most dedicated among us wonder if the effort to educate the public about fire safety makes any difference.

It does. Amid the steady onslaught of catastrophes, it can be easy to miss the many examples of how our efforts directly save lives. I'd like to share a few recent successes with you.

Just after Fire Prevention Week this past October, I was heartened to read an article in the *Daily Record* in Dunn, North Carolina, which chronicled how a five-year-old girl named Taylor saved the home—and possibly the lives—of her family. When Taylor saw smoke coming from the laundry room, she immediately alerted her grandparents, allowing the family and their pets to escape before fire spread to other parts of the house.

"We are attributing [Taylor's actions] to the public education the young lady received in preschool," Banks Wallace, Harnett County's deputy chief fire marshal, told the newspaper. Wallace added that the incident is a perfect example of NFPA's 2019 Fire Prevention Week theme, "Not Every Hero Wears a Cape—Plan and Practice your Escape," and stressed the importance of the fire service spreading this message. "In this case, the hero was Taylor," he said. The family even had an escape plan, and used it when one exit was blocked by smoke.

A few months before, a five-year-old boy in Chicago named Jayden awoke one night to a fire in the kitchen. He alerted his family and led them all—including two sisters and three



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young cousins—safely out of the home. "I yelled to my auntie there was fire," Jayden later told WGN news. The boy knew about fire safety from school fire drills and had played video games about escape planning. One relative told a reporter that Jayden even knew enough to tell his sister to crouch low to avoid smoke during the evacuation.

In NFPA's home state of Massachusetts, the state Department of Fire Services solicits similar stories through its "Young Heroes Awards" program. Nearly 400 children have been recognized as young heroes since the program's inception in 1995. One of last year's recipients was a teenager who helped her brother safely escape their home when a smoke alarm alerted them to a kitchen fire. The incident, coincidentally, occurred during Fire Prevention Week.

These are just a few stories among many. Countless others will likely never surface—we have no way of knowing about all of the fires that didn't happen because someone took our safety

messaging to heart. But just because we can't measure these non-fires doesn't mean they shouldn't be acknowledged.

In a world where bad news tends to carry the day, these stories are powerful reminders that our efforts to educate the public remain critical for reducing loss from fire and other hazards. Never lose sight of your impact and keep the successes in your thoughts, because each one is a life saved and a family that still has a home. The number of fire deaths and injuries in the United States has been reduced significantly over the decades, in large part because of work being done by fire safety educators with little fanfare in communities across the country.

There is still much work to do, but in the meantime, don't forget how important you are. 🙌

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