

City of Highland Park, IL

Case Profile

Population:

31,365

Square miles:

13

Median household income:

\$100,967

Form of government:

Council-manager

Performance Indicator

- **One- and two-family residential structure fires confined to room of origin**

For FY 2006, the city of Highland Park reported that it was able to confine 90 percent of one- and two-family residential structure fires to the room of origin. The mean and median values for all jurisdictions reporting were both 57 percent.

Well-placed stations and aggressive automatic aid promote rapid responses

When asked how the city has had such great success in confining fires to room of origin, Highland Park officials cited the city's rapid response system. They noted that the city responds to nearly 95 percent of fire calls in five minutes or less, and they attributed this to

- **Well-positioned fire stations**—The city boasts the presence of one fire station for every 4.2 square miles on average
- **An aggressive automatic aid program**—While many jurisdictions in the United States have mutual aid agreements with neighboring communities, in the Chicago area (where Highland Park is located), initial response automatic aid is aggressively employed to ensure that responders are always summoned from the closest fire station regardless of whether the station lies within the same legal jurisdiction as the subject of the call for assistance.

Other factors cited by the city as likely contributors to being able to confine fires to room of origin include:

- **Installing central station automatic alarm systems**—With all businesses and many homes having fire alarms connected to monitoring services (either private or city run), fires are detected quickly and the alarms are reported rapidly to the fire department, thus allowing for early suppression.
- **Adding sprinklers during home remodels**—The city recommends that sprinklers be added to the furnace room during all home remodeling projects. This recommendation is communicated to the property owner during the plan review and inspection process.
- **Enforcing building codes**—The city adheres to national building code standards—and enforces them aggressively—thus helping to prevent fires in the first place and discouraging the spread of fires that do occur.
- **Educating the public**—The city also sends firefighters into local schools to teach children about the importance of fire safety. The firefighters encourage children to remind their parents about replacing smoke detector batteries, eliminating extension cords, and implementing other fire safety measures.



For additional information about the practices described in this case study, please contact Patrick Brennan, deputy city manager, at 847/926-1003 or pbrennan@cityhpil.com.

Quarterly performance reporting maintains focus

In addition to measures explicitly intended to help confine fires to the room of origin, the Highland Park Fire Department also tracks performance on this measure and others to ensure that department personnel remain focused on performance.

The department reports its performance statistics to the city manager once each quarter and also compares its own performance with that of peer communities annually. Where differences are found between Highland Park and other communities, staff conduct research to determine the reasons for the differences and whether techniques in use in other communities might result in improvements in Highland Park.