

Tilley Award 2006

Application form

Please ensure that you have read the guidance before completing this form. By making an application to the awards, entrants are agreeing to abide by the conditions laid out in the Guidance. Please complete the following form in full and within the word limit. Failure to do so could result in disqualification from the competition.

Completed application forms should be e-mailed to Tricia Perkins; patricia.perkins@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

All entries must be received by noon on Friday 28th April 2006. No entries will be accepted after this time/date. Any queries on the application process should be directed to Tricia Perkins on 0207 035 0262. Any queries regarding other aspects of the awards should be directed to Michael Wilkinson on 0207 035 0247 or Lindsey Poole on 0207 035 0234.

Please tick box to indicate whether the entry should be considered for the main award, the criminal damage award or both;

Main award

Criminal Damage Award

Both Awards

1. Details of application

Title of the project Blitz on Bonfires Campaign

Name of force/agency/CDRP:

West Midlands Police supporting West Midlands Fire Service and Birmingham Community Safety Partnership

Name of one contact person with position/rank (this should be one of the authors):

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Name of endorsing senior representatives(s) Steve JORDAN

Position and rank of endorsing senior representatives(s) F3 OCU Commander, Chief Superintendent Steve JORDAN (4668 West Midlands Police)

Full address of endorsing senior representatives(s) Thornhill Road Police Station, Birmingham. B21 9BT.

2. Summary of application

In no more than 400 words please use this space to describe your project. Include details of the problem that was addressed a description of the initiative, the main intervention principles and what they were designed to achieve, the main outcomes of project particularly in relation to the problem, evidence was used in designing the programme and how the project is evaluated.

Blitz on Bonfires Campaign

Problem

Unregulated bonfires that are built often on public land and in close proximity to housing stock and on open public spaces. Project time-period of intervention was 1st October to 30th November 2005, this time period covers the festivities surrounding November 5th/'Bonfire Night' and Diwali which often result in the attendance of the Fire Service and place a 'stretch' upon the Service. These incidents can become a focal point for anti-social behaviour and can lead to Fire crews being 'stoned' and physically assaulted.

Initiative to Tackle the Problem

A dedicated hotline for all citizens and partner agencies' officers to report the location of bonfires being built and additional waste management staff brought in to remove offending sites prior to their ignition.

Main Intervention Principles

Wide press promotion of project to discourage the building of bonfires and reassure communities of work to tackle the issue.

Pre-emptive action to remove unregulated bonfires, before they are ignited.

Positive promotion of alternative regulated events as a credible alternative

Main Outcomes

- Reduction of calls to the Fire Service for attendance at unregulated bonfires.
- Reduction in anti-social behaviour and complaints about fires
- Improved Fire Service attendance times.
- Reduction in casualties from fire.
- Improved local relations between police, city council and fire crews. Both contributing to a mutually beneficial project
- Reduction in criminal damage as reducing the pay-off of the crime by removing the bonfires which may have as a fuel source fences and other illegally obtained garden furniture.

Evidence used in Project Design and Evaluation

Previous locations of secondary fires were identified and checked by police and fire crews on a regular basis to ascertain whether these traditional locations were again likely to be used for a bonfire or whether waste present could provide a source of fuel to such an event or other secondary fire.

The main evidence was the number of calls received to the Fire Service to attend such incidents. The project also monitored the number of calls to the 'hotline' and actions taken to address the concerns.

The project whilst not intending to monitor the removal of waste and its contents, incidentally did and recorded the number of more hazardous items such as LPG cylinders and discarded vehicle tyres removed.

Monitoring of press related articles also occurred to manage the press reactions and level of publicity achieved by the project.

The project was evaluated using the above and also the cost-benefits realised, some areas of further improvement were noted for future, such as the monitoring of ambulance call-out data.

3. Description of project

Describe the project following the guidance given in no more than 4000 words

Blitz on Bonfires Campaign

Objectives of the Project

Objective :-

To reduce the number of unregulated bonfires on public open space surrounding the time-frame that is associated with the traditional celebration of November 5th and other festivities through what is often deemed as the 'firework period'..

Success Criteria :-

- Reduction of calls to the Fire Service for attendance at unregulated bonfires.
- Reduction in anti-social behaviour
- Improved Fire Service attendance times.
- Reduction in casualties from fire.
- Improved local relations between police, city council and fire crews. Both contributing to a mutually beneficial project

Significant Concern?

The project aims would not feature highly on many members of the public area of concern accept as a form of anti-social behaviour, and fire is often viewed as only an important issue to the Fire Service. However it is a key issue in relation to the environmental damage it can do, the spread of fire to other areas and the fact that these events can become focal points for anti-social behaviour and other incidents of public disorder. Due to a high level of demand upon the Fire Service the movement of crews to provide effective fire cover is costly to the public and also places a possible reduction in the necessary expedient response to a more serious Fire and Rescue emergency call.

Partner Involvement:-

The project was lead by West Midlands Fire Service and Birmingham City Council, under the auspices of Birmingham Community Safety Partnership – alongside colleagues from West Midlands Police and indeed a tripartite officer working group was set up to manage the day to day aspects of the project.

Definition of the Problem

Reliable Information/Sources and its Analyses:-

Scanning - To identify the location of secondary fires previously all areas of Birmingham were reviewed on a local authority boundary basis for the project time period over the previous year. This then generated risk based maps for local fire and police crews to use and guide their searching of possible location sites during the project's lifespan. All secondary fire reports were scrutinised further and a search for text in the fire call specifically mentioning the word 'bonfire' was also reviewed to drill the data sets down further.

This data was collated by West Midlands Fire Service and analysed by Community Safety Partnerships analysts using the Community Safety Mapping On-Line System (COSMOS) which this year won the International Crime Mapping Award. This data was then also over-layed with further GIS based data from the Environment Agency and the national local authority reporting of fly-tipped waste system 'Fly Capture', providing a preventative based intelligence tool for the probable location of bonfires and other dangerous waste sites.

This information was then disseminated locally and local fire and police crews tasked with the operational response and addition of their local knowledge to focus their attention.

Conclusions:-

Analysis - The data provided a historical context to where the locations of fires/bonfires had previously been lit and coupled with the local authority waste management data gave a clear indication of likely locations for fly tipped rubbish, sources of fuel for a fire and locations where bonfires may be built.

This subsequently provided risk based maps and gave local crews the direction and prioritisation for their work and undertaking of a street-search based on local authority boundaries. This was unusual for local emergency services to operate in such a way and necessitated joint tasking and coordination, however it was necessary for the work to occur in this way for the local authority to respond and operate with its waste management crews who are based on a district level. Eleven such areas exist within the Birmingham City Council area of responsibility and they are based on the parliamentary boundaries and indeed in an effort to support preventative based work alongside partners the Fire Service has reconfigured its station areas on these boundaries for all preventative based activity.

Nature and Extent of Problem:-

The analysis gave clear locations for previous locations of bonfires and emergency calls to the fire service. This gave excellent historical context on where checks should occur for potential in the year of the project as it monitored the locations for 2004 (37 locations) and 2003 (34 locations). The local authority data gave a good indication of where fly tipped rubbish is dumped and what could act as a source of possible fuel to such incidents. It also provided information on the type of sites that were regularly appearing as a type of location this is often fly-tipped, such as parks and canal sides.

It also assisted partnership working as local crews searching possible problem areas gave an up-to-date picture of current problems and also advice on what areas once cleared would benefit from target hardening to prevent a reoccurrence – this in turn was fed into the District based community safety tasking groups for action.

Information Gaps:-

Police command and Control data relating to fires is routinely sent to Fire Command and Control (a legal requirement). An audit of the data confirmed that fire data was being exchanged so police Command and Control data was not used to avoid duplication.

One area of information that would be useful but does not exist would be burns data arising from bonfires. However this information is not collated to such a detailed extent in Accident and Emergency facilities or by local primary care providers. Burns and scolds data exists with Ambulance STORS data however is limited in the sense it covers burns and scolds, so obviously a bonfire does not produce a scold and only relates to the location for where an ambulance is called not to the location of the problem. The other area it is also lacking is any evidence of whether the incident was an unregulated bonfire on open land or a public/private organised event with the necessary permissions and safeguards in place. However it is recognised that if these could be addressed even at a local level for the duration of the project it could provide potentially valuable data for further preventative based work and also possibly access to persons who as a result of their injuries may be willing to give impactful public support to the project.

Hospital Accident and Emergency Triage data is in a similar difficulty although it records scolds or burns within separate categories. It is interesting to note though that the Burns Unit at the Queen Elizabeth 11 Hospital, which is the primary burns unit for the city and region, did not receive one emergency admission for burns caused by a firework or bonfire and is a positive indicator if we associate illegal bonfires with firework injuries.

Agency Involvement:

The primary agencies involved in this project were: - Birmingham City Council; West Midlands Police and West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service. The project was managed by the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership to ensure good multi-agency representation and also clear delivery on a large cross-city project of this type. The two crucial areas within the local authority were waste management and housing (owners of key areas of high-risk public open space).

In terms of delivery, senior officer leadership was secured through the Community Safety Partnership; this in turn fed-down to local command through the District based Community Safety Groups. This group was then charged with the tactical tasking and coordination role with ancillary support and coordination maintained as the centre. This helped ensure a corporacy in approach and also swift resolution of problems as they emerged. Central coordination

also helped ensure appropriate feedback and best value in planning the clearance of areas on a District basis and a swift response to local demand and pressing needs.

Response to the Problem

Analysis and Response Design

There is a clear simple link between dumped rubbish and bonfires built on public land and their subsequent ignition. Within the fire triangle if there is a removal of the source of fuel then fire cannot survive or be ignited in the case of this project.

Response - Street searches undertaken covered the whole of the city but also had a graded response based on analysis to ensure regular monitoring of previously problematic areas and also to ensure these were regularly checked over the course of the project's lifespan. All identified problem sites were reported on a dedicated phone line which was staffed during office hours and had an answer machine service out of office hours. This dedicated hotline provided coordinated command and control tasking process for waste management clearance crews who were then directed on a daily basis on what areas to clear with a clear graded response to more high-risk areas of the city or indeed based on the content of the bonfires, such as reports of LPG cylinders, tyres, aerosols, plastics and asbestos which all contributed to an increased risk and generated an earlier and more speedier response.

Appropriate Response?

To this type of event there are little other courses of action one could follow. One could have a general publicity campaign and ask the public not to indulge in this type of behaviour and one could ask them to report the location of bonfires being built and waste dumped. However whilst this works well for fly-tipped rubbish when it is affecting a householder directly, this approach has been tried the previous year in relation to bonfires and across the city there was not one complaint received and was a costly exercise to have a dedicated phone line and no result. This year though the line was staffed through office hours and also had no abandoned calls when answered which experience shows can occur when only an answer machine is available.

Supportive Evidence

The 2005 campaign saw a reduction in the number of incidents attended by the Fire Service from 37 to 16 based again on the original baseline of 01/10/03 to 30.11.03. This reduction of 62% can also be viewed as a potential underestimation as the figures given are only included where 'bonfire' is mentioned in the incident type or incident details fields of the emergency logs generated by the Fire Service. If the incident has not been identified as involving a bonfire in one of these ways then it will have been excluded.

Project Ownership

The project was owned by the Community Safety Partnership of whom the three key partners, including West Midlands Police are defined as 'responsible authorities' within the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (amended by the Police Reform Act 2002). The partnership is chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable Anil PATANI and this project was overseen by Chief Superintendent Jordan and Deputy Chief Fire Officer Vijith RANDENIYA.

Resource Allocation

Officer time was crucial to this project and seniority of ownership helped ensure that this was allocated. £10,000 was allocated to this project as it had been the previous year, however the year previous had only spent £2,000 of this allocation so spend this time was very carefully monitored so any under-spend could quickly be reallocated. £8,000 of spend was achieved in 2005 and equates to cost saving to the public purse of £23,500. These monies were primarily spent on the staffing of the 'hotline' number and additional wages incurred by the Local Authority's waste management staff.

This is based on a figure of £1,500 for fire service attendance at a secondary fire, which bonfires are classed as (Source – Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). This sum was then set against the baseline attendance to 37 incidents, deleting the attendance of 16 and giving a figure of 21 less incidents, minus the initial investment. Officer time has not been calculated in this cost saving.

Problems Identified and Management

There was due to the previous year a concern that the problem was not a large one due to the low number of calls received to the hotline, however we also know that the Fire Service attended a high number of rubbish type fires and these could also impact upon people's views of their neighbourhoods and could contribute to a genuine concern over the level of crime and anti-social behaviour in their community.

One of the main difficulties was potentially a negative reaction to this project by the press and a furtherance and reduction in community relationships built by partner agencies. All press was carefully controlled and if comments were made they were through only one designated officer. The reporting phone line number was promoted in a variety of mediums, such as West Midlands Police 'Message of the Day'; BBC Radio; Birmingham Evening Mail to name but a few and generated considerable media interest. Members of the public were encouraged to report bonfire locations and the phone line was staffed rather than being an answering machine. Some negative press was received but the campaign was robustly defended and overwhelmingly received positive support. The hotline received 59 actionable reports and 11 general bonfire and firework safety enquiries which were referred to the fire safety department at West Midlands Fire Service. The hotline also recorded 4 calls for out of area service which were taken and passed to the appropriate local authority concerned.

Ongoing Review

The campaign linked in with Birmingham City Council and their press relations and event teams. This led to the campaign supporting the two organised public events in Birmingham as an alternative to members of the public having their own bonfire and also has a spin-off benefit of being given the opportunity to pursue wider fire safety messages.

It is anticipated that in future that the project will become a core area of work for the Fire Service and be mainstreamed as an annual activity. It now currently features in the Service's directed action planning process and contributes to the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). It will be subject to regular performance review by internal Fire Service procedures and indeed the Fire Service in its Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) by the Audit Commission was rated as 'good' as this project specifically mentioned as an area of 'good practice'.

Creativity

Often the Fire Service is seen as a poor relation in the field of community safety and this project was key in raising their profile and partnership working not just with the local authority but also the police, where historically there has been some mistrust between the organizations but led to the following spin-off benefits:

- The whole project also supported the development of a preventative based culture within the Fire Service.
- It also raised the issue of problem-solving and how to apply it to reduce incidents of fire.
- Fire crews working hand-in-hand to plan the project and its delivery has seen some strong local partnerships also now formed and indeed led to a situation where police tasking and operations with the local authority and the DVLA to tackle untaxed and abandoned vehicles review vehicle arson data as a guidance tool for the location of these operations and is having some exciting results in driving down vehicle arson.
- Enhanced reputation of West Midlands Fire Service in the community safety arena.

Evaluation

Assessment - A review of the work has occurred and looked at the strengths of the project and were summarized in six key areas and are as follows:

- Proper Planning
- Wide Partner Involvement
- External Publicity
- Dedicated Resource and Input
- Alternative Organised Events Promotion
- Leadership

Planning

Rather than 'tagging onto' another local authority campaign at the last minute, 2005 saw a six-month planning cycle and linked in earlier with the wider Firework safety campaign. This also allowed a proper scoping exercise to take place and the focusing of the campaign more on areas of traditional higher risk such as Hodge Hill and Erdington.

Wider Partner Involvement

2005 secured the involvement of other key partners such as West Midlands Police, Birmingham City Council departments (those not traditionally contacted, for example the Housing Department and Highways) and linked to the local media.

External Publicity

The campaign in 2005 went 'public'. The reporting phone line number was promoted in a variety of mediums, such as West Midlands Police 'Message of the Day'; BBC Radio; Birmingham Evening Mail to name but a few and generated considerable media interest. Members of the public were encouraged to report bonfire locations and the phone line was staffed rather than being an answering machine. Some negative press was received but the campaign was robustly defended and overwhelmingly received positive support.

Dedicated Resource/Input

The campaign had a dedicated lead officer. Local Fire Service and policing teams based on District boundaries commenced a street search during the campaign to pro-actively identify bonfire locations and report them to the staffed 'hotline'. The line being staffed lead also to a reduction in the number of previously experienced abandoned calls (calls terminated without leaving a message).

Alternative Organised Event Promotion

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Leadership

The campaign had an officer dedicated to its development and promotion which was crucial to its success. It also allowed an easier communicative channel for internal partners.

Support from partners was crucial to its success and indeed all partner agencies and departments had a nominated lead officer. Support from senior officers was secured earlier on, which also added credence and support to the campaign.

The Result

The 2005 campaign saw a reduction in the number of incidents attended by the Fire Service from 37 to 16 based again on the original baseline of 01/10/03 to 30.11.03. This reduction of 62% can also be viewed as a potential underestimation as the figures given are only included where 'bonfire' is mentioned in the incident type or incident details fields of the emergency logs generated by the Fire Service. If the incident has not been identified as involving a bonfire in one of these ways then it will have been excluded.

£8,000 of spend was achieved in 2005 and equates to cost saving to the public purse of £23,500. These monies were primarily spent on the staffing of the 'hotline' number and additional wages incurred by the Local Authority's waste management staff.

This is based on a figure of £1,500 for fire service attendance at a secondary fire, which bonfires are classed as (Source – Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). This sum was then set against the baseline attendance to 37 incidents, deleting the attendance of 16 and giving a figure of 21 less incidents, minus the initial investment. Officer time has not been calculated in this cost saving.

Conclusion

This project was simple in its design which also has been one of its most powerful components. Out of the project has come not just a large reduction in fire calls to the Fire Service but also an improvement in partnership working which is now paving the way for further projects and opening up new doors of opportunity.