

# The First Act

## The Vision20/20 forum identified five strategies to reduce fire losses

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On the evening of April 1, 2008, after two very productive days of intense brainstorming and in-depth discussions, the curtain finally came down on the first act of the Vision 20/20's National Strategic Agenda for Fire Loss Prevention. Quite literally, this forum was a gathering of a "who's-who" of fire safety attending from across the country and the UK and Australia. There were more than 170 participants representing our nation's fire service, and leaders of major national fire protection and safety organizations.

"This project is unprecedented in scope and depth. We have assembled an incredible array of experts from a diversity of fields to help craft a national plan to reduce the loss of life and property from fire. Through our collective efforts we will develop strategies that will save lives, now and for the future", said Jim Crawford, Fire Marshal for the city of Vancouver, WA, and the Vision 20/20 project manager.

Vision 20/20 was conceived last year, when the Institute of Fire Engineers (IFE) - US Branch was awarded a Fire Prevention and Safety Grant by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to develop a comprehensive national strategy for fire prevention. Vision 20/20's National Strategic Agenda for Fire Loss Prevention is a project with the goal of helping to bring together fire prevention efforts and focus everyone's efforts collectively to effectively address the fire problem in the United States.

A noble cause indeed. But, as you all know well, "this isn't our first dance", and we have been down this road on many occasions before. The 1947 President's Conference on Fire Prevention, the 1973 America Burning report, the 1987 America Burning Revisited report, and finally the 2000 America Burning Recommissioned (America at Risk) report, were all focused on the very same issue. So what's different about the Vision 20/20 Plan? Vision 20/20's website answers it as such:

1. This project involves a large number of participants representing all areas of fire prevention as well as other advocates and stakeholders to the plan and its recommended outcomes.
2. This project is committed to action, with a few strategic recommendations being converted to a national plan that stakeholders will be asked to support with documentation of specific actions and benchmarks instead of a long list of recommended practices that everyone agrees are important (but then never get completed).
3. This project will not create recommendations in a vacuum. Other existing efforts that have identified significant progress toward achieving prevention goals will be taken into account to avoid competing efforts.
4. A long term monitoring mechanism will provide regular reports on the progress of the strategic initiatives that arise out of Vision 20/20.

If "commitment to action" is the litmus test; then the fact that despite many challenges Vision 20/20 was able to pull such a high caliber team together, and have such a productive forum, in itself is a solid step and a major accomplishment. This forum was a significant step in the right direction. It is important to emphasize though that this was only the first step in beginning the journey, and not the final step. There are still many more steps yet to be taken.

It is of utmost importance to show appreciation when it is due; and I for one am amazed and very grateful for the hard work and long hours that Peg Carson with Carson Associates, and Bill Kehoe with the IFE - US had spent on bringing this "first act" to be played on the national stage. Without their admirable commitment to the cause, this indeed would not have been possible.

Reviewing the reports from the previous national conferences mentioned above, one can clearly identify a common theme for increasing efforts in fire prevention is always emphasized as a key component to the fire safety problem in the United States.

Recognizing the importance of fire prevention, IFE invited panelists from Australia and England to share their international perspectives with the participants. The "International Perspective" panel discussion was quite interesting and of tremendous value in disseminating information about the incredibly innovative approaches and programs that are currently being done overseas, where we could learn a lot from.

Neil Bibby, Chief Executive Officer of County Fire Authority, Victoria, Australia; Philip Hales, Head of Community Fire Safety of Cheshire Fire & Rescue Services, Winsford, England; Phil Schaenman, President of Tri-Data Systems Planning Corporation; and Mick Ballesteros, Epidemiologist/Team Lead of the Home and Recreation Injury Prevention with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC); shared with us their experiences and successes in reducing fire fatalities and losses, which only underlined the fact many of us in the United States are only beginning to realize about how far behind the rest of the world we are in our fire prevention efforts.

At the end of the two days, the participants of the Vision20/20 Forum identified five specific strategies and developed action plans for reducing fire fatalities and losses in America. The specifics and the details of these strategies will be posted on the Vision 20/20 website in the very near future, but here are the outlines:

- **Advocacy** - Get on the agenda to make America safe from fire.
- **Public Education** - Establish a consistent, sustained, multi-faceted educational/social marketing campaign to reduce risks and losses from fire by getting people to change their behavior toward fire safety.
- **Fire Service Culture** - Shift the organizational culture within the fire service so that prevention is accepted and supported as a primary service for public safety.
- **Technology** - Promote and leverage existing and new technology to enhance fire and life safety.
- **Codes & Standards** - Development and application of codes and standards to enhance public and firefighter safety and preserve community assets.

"Everyone wants to see something happen. They just don't want another report sitting on the shelf. They want to see action. They want to show that taxpayers' money was not wasted" said Jim Crawford. According to Ed Comeau with writer-tech.com, "Everyone was in agreement that it will be critically important for there to be an ongoing commitment to this project and its ideas. Many people signed up to continue working on the various strategies as this project continues to move forward, demonstrating such a commitment."

I hope that this level of excitement and commitment continues in future, and just like the participants, we all recognize that this forum was not the conclusion, but merely the beginning of our journey in addressing the fire problem in our country. Back in the 1947, at the conclusion of the Conference on Fire Prevention, it was stated "we have enlisted not for a brief skirmish, but for the whole campaign. In winning that campaign we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that we are saving lives and putting an end to the wanton destruction of our nation's resources." It just can't be said any better than that.

### **Related Links**

- [Vision 20/20 Website](#)
- [United States Branch of the Institution of Fire Engineers](#)
- [2000 America Burning Re-commissioned \(America at Risk\)](#)
- [1973 America Burning Report](#)
- [1987 America Burning Revisited Report](#)
- [The 1947 President's Conference on Fire Prevention](#)
- Webcast: [Vision 20/20: Developing a National Agenda for Fire Prevention](#)
- Podcast [Fire Marshal's Corner](#)
- [Specific Strategies Identified at Vision 20/20](#)
- [Vision 20/20 Targets National Agenda for Fire Prevention](#)