



Background

In the fall of 1987, a series of house fires devastated Milwaukee by claiming the lives of 35 people -- 18 of whom were children. In response to this tragic loss of life, a Fire Prevention Task Force was appointed by then Mayor Henry Maier to explore ways in which the Milwaukee community could prevent future fire fatalities. The concept of a Fire Safety Education Center "Survive Alive House" was proposed to the Fire Prevention Task Force for consideration. It was felt that a fire safety and prevention program introduced at an early age would be an effective way of teaching children to "survive alive." The Task Force approved the proposal in December, 1987, at which time a committee consisting of individuals from the Milwaukee Public Schools Recreation Department, Milwaukee Fire Department, Metropolitan Builders Association, Milwaukee Department of Building Inspection, and the Milwaukee Common Council was formed to begin the planning and development of the Survive Alive House.

The Milwaukee Fire Education Center's Survive Alive House, located at 2059 S. 20th Street, officially opened its doors in February 1992. Over 26,000 Milwaukee children visit each year to learn how to "survive alive" in the event of an actual fire. The house is available to schools, community groups, governmental units and agencies. The Survive Alive House is operated jointly by the Milwaukee Public Schools Recreation Department and the Milwaukee Fire Department. Milwaukee Firefighters, along with part-time MPS Recreation staff and volunteers, assist in the program's operations.

The Survive Alive House contains two replicas of a child's bedroom, complete with beds, dressers, and toys. Electronically controlled "hot doors," fire simulation lighting, and non-toxic smoke within the bedrooms all combine to offer a realistic fire experience for the participants. A control booth located between the bedrooms contains the controls needed to operate various fire simulations (smoke, lighting, and hot doors). Survive Alive House staff operating the booth are able to view each bedroom, providing for additional supervision of the participants.



Curriculum

The Fire Education Center contains two classrooms that provide an ideal setting for discussions on fire safety. These discussions help to reinforce the practical experience students receive in the Survive Alive House.

Fire safety curriculum materials are developed jointly by the MPS Recreation Department, the Milwaukee Fire Department, and the Milwaukee Safety Commission.

The Survive Alive House curriculum consists of three components:

- 1 In preparation for their visit to the Survive Alive House, children receive classroom instruction on fire safety from their teacher. As a result, students are better prepared to retain the information they receive during their visit.
- 2 The visit to the Survive Alive House consists of 2.5 hours of instruction from Milwaukee Firefighters which includes practical experience in the Survive Alive House, a video, and discussion on fire safety.
- 3 A post test is administered at the students' school to determine their retention of the fire safety skills learned at the Survive Alive House.

The fire prevention training students receive during the classroom portion of their visit is reinforced with a hands-on practical experience within the Survive Alive House. Children are placed in one of two replicas of a child's bedroom. As they are "sleeping," the room begins to fill with smoke. A smoke detector is sounded, at which time children are instructed to roll out of bed onto the floor and crawl to the door. These electronically controlled "hot doors" give an indication of whether or not this is a viable escape. Children are instructed to feel the door with the backs of their hands. If the door is warm to the touch, the children must escape via an alternative route. Once all of the children in the house have escaped and arrived at their "meeting place," one student is instructed to call 911 on the pay phone which runs directly into the Survive Alive House control room. This practical experience provides children with a realistic opportunity to learn how to successfully escape a burning house.