

Abstract

This paper outlines the initial stages of Kent Fire and Rescue Service's (KFRS) project to build a comprehensive database of the behaviours and associated motivations of those directly experiencing an accidental dwelling fire (ADF). Although human behaviour in fires in public, commercial and industrial spaces is a well-established area, for the past thirty years the study of human behaviour in dwelling fires has received only restricted and sporadic attention. Consequently, there is only a limited understanding of how individuals behave during dwelling fires. The first stage of KFRS's applied research was a pilot study comprising semi-structured interviews with ten participants who had experienced an ADF. The results of this qualitative pilot were used to inform the design of a mixed methods questionnaire survey that is now routinely distributed to those who have directly experienced an ADF in Kent. Supported by a system where fire crews attending an ADF obtain a contact name and telephone number, as of May 2012 some 140 completed surveys had been returned. The results of the pilot and the subsequent work have begun to provide insight into occupants' actions and reasoning before a decision is made to call 999 (the emergency services contact telephone number in the UK) and also before the arrival of the fire service. Although this work is still only in its early stages and further development is clearly required, data from returned surveys show that, after respondents become aware of a fire, a significant proportion are postponing calling 999, attempting to tackle or mitigate the fire themselves, and re-entering the property before the arrival of the fire service. This work will be of direct value to the operations, call handling and community safety sections of fire and rescue services in the UK and beyond.

Wales, D., & Thompson, O. (2012). **Behaviours, motivations and timescales: Towards the development of a comprehensive database of human behaviour in fire.** In the Proceedings of the 5th International Symposium on Human Behaviour in Fire 2012. London, England: Interscience Communications.