

New Bedford Fire Department increasing inspections; launching fire safety education program

“Mayor Jon Mitchell is bolstering the fire code enforcement resources of the Fire Department with additional staff in the Department’s Fire Prevention Unit (FPU) and an increase in regular inspections in high-risk neighborhoods, including multifamily dwellings with three or more units, boarding and lodging houses, and treatment facilities. Under the plan, the FPU will be able to conduct 200 more inspections of high-risk properties per quarter over the current level of inspections.

Likewise, beginning this month, the Fire Department will expand its public awareness efforts, with the launch of a city-wide educational campaign to increase public awareness of fire safety. Community engagements will include enlisting interpreters to provide fire safety education to non-English speaking residents, attending neighborhood and civic group meetings, interacting with business leaders, along with radio and television appearances. A dedicated Fire Safety Educator will provide instruction on a variety of educational topics including fire safety, babysitter safety classes, dormitory safety training for teenagers, senior citizen fire safety along with CPR, defibrillator, first aid, and fire extinguisher training.

“The Department has a well-earned reputation for being highly proficient in emergency response, but we have always known that there were significant opportunities to complement that emergency response capacity with prevention initiatives,” said Mayor Mitchell. The addition of a dedicated Code Compliance Supervisor and a Fire Safety Educator now gives the Department

the necessary resources to take their prevention efforts to the next level. The expected increase in inspection activity, as well as the improved public awareness of fire risks, are going to make our City safer for everyone.”

The new investments in Fire Prevention mark the second expansion of the FPU under Mayor Mitchell. In 2020, Mayor Mitchell assigned two additional code compliance inspectors to the Fire Prevention Bureau to meet the increasing demands of Massachusetts General Law Chapter 148 Section 26F which requires any residential occupancy to be inspected and protected by working smoke detectors upon sale or transfer of the property.

The additional Fire Prevention investments announced today will allow the City to return critical inspection initiatives that had been suspended for nearly twenty years. Due to budgetary constraints in 2005, the dedicated inspector position was phased out. Today’s announcement allows the City to return to enforcing compliance with this key section of Massachusetts law. Beginning this month, the new Code Compliance Supervisor will work in conjunction with Building Inspectors to ensure dwellings with three or more apartments are protected with working hardwire smoke alarms. The Code Compliance Officer will also conduct inspections in buildings with a history of fire code violations and fire, are not owner-occupied, and in areas of the City with a greater occurrence of structure fires.

“Once a building or occupancy is brought into compliance with any fire code or law, the challenge is maintaining that compliance. Having an inspector dedicated to enforcement “at high-risk properties” is going to make these buildings much safer going forward,” said Fire Chief Scott Kruger.

Fire Chief Scott Kruger also emphasized the key role fire safety education can have in shaping daily habits that reduce fire risk, noting “Most fires start with some type of human

involvement whether it's carelessness, an intentional, or unintentional act. Whether you're a building owner, tenant, at home, school, or work, we all need the knowledge to prevent fires and to understand how to respond when one occurs."