



THE FIRE PROTECTION RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Pilot Demonstration of an Impact Evaluation Protocol: NIST NCST Recommendations of the Station Nightclub Fire

Meeting Summary

Project Technical Panel (PTP) Meeting
Conference Call
Tuesday, 25 February 2014

1. Call to Order and Attendees
 - a. Amanda Kimball, project manager for the Foundation, called the meeting to order at 2pm. The following were in attendance: Scott Adams, Ralph Gerdes, Harold Hansen, Greg Miller, Kelly Nicoletto, Jeff Tubbs, Carl Wren, Rita Fahy, Robert Solomon, John Hall, Nancy McNabb, Nelson Bryner, Anthony Hamins, and Long Phan. A Panel roster is included as Appendix A.
2. Project Background and FPRF Policies
 - a. Foundation Policies were previously circulated to the Panel. The following are the key points:
 - i. In accordance with the Policies, the role of the Panel is advisory in nature and intended to provide guidance back to the contractor.
 - ii. The Panel will oversee the technical conduct of the project including recommendation of the contractor, progress reviews, and reviews of reports and other deliverables.
 - iii. All reports are authored by the contractor.
 - iv. Once completed, all Foundation reports are made publically available.
 - v. Project results and interim reports should not be distributed outside of the Panel prior to the completion of the final report without Foundation approval.
 - b. Project background – NIST is interested in measuring the impact of the recommendations that are issued based on the findings from an investigation of a disaster. This applies to both fire and non-fire disasters. The purpose of this pilot project is to develop a methodology that can generally be used to measure the impact of these recommendations. The methodology is being demonstrated by applying it to The Station nightclub fire in RI. The recommendations resulting from this study are located here: http://www.nist.gov/public_affairs/factsheet/ri_recomm_factsheet.cfm.

3. Overview of the Project Tasks

- a. Amanda circulated the project summary prior to the call. Again, the focus of the project is developing a generalized methodology. The tasks as listed in the summary include:
 - i. Task 2 - Analysis of Data Related to Fire Departments/Legislation, Adoption and Enforcement Recommendations – How well have communities addressed recommendations 1-5 and 7 related to adoption/enforcement of model codes/standards?
 - ii. Task 3 – Analysis of Changes to Model Codes and Standards – How well have the model codes/standards addressed recommendations 1-5 and 7?
 - iii. Task 4 – Literature Review/Research Recommendations – How well has the research community addressed recommendations 6 and 8-10? How much quality research has been done and how many knowledge gaps still exist?
 - iv. Task 5 – Synergistic Review and Integration of Primary Evaluations – How do the findings related to adoption and enforcement recommendations compare to the other (research) recommendations?

4. Review of Task 2 Draft Report

- a. John Hall presented an overview of the Task 2 draft report, which was distributed to the Panel before the call.
- b. NFPA has been interested in the success of the recommendations and how they relate to NFPA's own findings and consideration of proposals for changes in codes and standards arising from these findings.
 - i. Therefore, NFPA prepared and distributed a survey related to lessons learned from any investigation of The Station nightclub fire; data from the survey was therefore also useful on recommendations 1-5 and 7.
- c. Three basic areas of information sought:
 - i. Adoption of requirements, which connects the gap between impact of recommendations at the national level and impact at local level
 - ii. Compliance with requirements
 1. Not in position to check nightclub compliance (this would be cost prohibitive), so asked the fire department what they thought the compliance was. Asked this in general; also for specific provisions.
 - iii. Timing of changes in requirements
- d. Survey used a lower bound of communities with populations of 50,000
 - i. If use a larger survey, will increase the cost and the variability (communities with maybe 1-2 nightclubs), and likely less compliance with requirements
- e. Panel feedback
 - i. Lack of definition of a what a nightclub is – no specific definition in NFPA documents or IBC, so everyone has their own definition; this can impact the results
 1. To add to the report:
 - a. When conducting an evaluation – pay attention to the clarity and congruence of the definitions used in recommendations, in

resulting changed requirements, and in databases on practices in the targeted properties

- b. When writing recommendations, pay attention to the generalizability of recommendations by being as specific as possible but not more specific (narrow) than is appropriate in identifying the group of properties to which the recommendations apply; do not just settle for the commonly used name for the specific property where the incident occurred
- ii. History of nightclub fires – many of the tragedies occurred in smaller cities/towns
 1. Lesson learned from survey that a significant percentage of nightclubs are in these smaller communities
 2. A full evaluation should include communities of all sizes
 3. The reasons why it is not as advantageous to survey smaller communities are listed in report as well (e.g. poor response rates, fewer communities with nightclubs)
- iii. Occupancies can change based on the seasons, events, etc – would need to visit these occupancies often to check on compliance with operational requirements, where behavior can change from day to day
- iv. Most every state and municipality is different
 1. Differences may not be so great that makes every place unique
 2. Based on NFPA's more recent work on enforcement – most departments have abandoned annual inspections of commercial occupancies unless there were specific issues
 3. The commonality is more important than the differences
- v. Noted that fire departments do not have a lot of say in the adoption of model codes
 1. Will fix this to say “communities” instead of “departments”
- vi. How generalizable is this methodology to non-fire incidents?
 1. Helpful to have the report reviewed with this in mind
- vii. NIST hopes that the methodology developed could feed into the recommendation process (who are we following up with)
 1. Will address this in the report as well
 2. For example, Austin FD is interested in planning for events that are not just fire and USFA has been pushing all risk prevention for years in regards with non-fire incidents
 3. What do you do if there is a disconnect between building and fire departments?
- viii. Code change for new construction is one thing – getting retroactivity is a completely different dynamic (more difficult) – try to address this point in the report

5. Next Steps and Timetable

- a. Written comments on the draft Task 2 report sent to Amanda by March 7th
 - i. As you review, please identify any areas that would benefit from further clarification during the literature review stage.
 - ii. Also welcome suggestions on a way of summarizing how we can provide a qualitative “grade” for this type of analysis.
- b. Draft final report in early April. This will incorporate a draft addressing the rest of the tasks as well as a revised Task 2.
- c. Clarified that the literature review is meant to gather the information related to the specific recommendations in order to measure how the recommendation has been addressed. For example, for recommendation 6 related to number and placement of portable fire extinguishers – what research has been done since the recommendations were issued, of what quality is the research, what holes remain, etc?

6. Next Meeting

- a. The next meeting will be in April to review the draft final report.



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Project Contacts

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Panel Members (proposed)

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