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Area firefighters celebrate Fire Prevention Week with educational programming, fun

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By Alex Zdan/The Times

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Firefighters throughout Mercer County have spent the week educating children, adults and families on the dangers of fire and ways to protect themselves from it.

Fire Prevention Week is a national initiative that this year has seen Trenton firefighters hosting schoolchildren at engine and ladder companies and Hamilton firefighters watching over an open burn designed to demonstrate sprinklers. This weekend, Mercer County will host a Family Fun and Safety Day.

"Everyone's been doing this for quite some time," Trenton Fire Director Qareeb Bashir said. "We feel really good about the participation this year, actually it's been very pleasantly surprising in the requests we received."

City firefighters are offering free smoke detectors, passing out literature and reminding residents of the museum at fire headquarters on Perry Street.



Times File Photo

Five-year-old Kristopher Klek of Hamilton is dressed in firefighter gear during Fire Prevention Week at Suburban Plaza, Hamilton in 2004.

They also go to schools and community organizations to make presentations, many of which focus on getting out of a burning home.

"I think it's just a reminder of the importance of having an exit plan, to know what to do in the event of fire, and also to be proactive," Bashir said.

Very few families have a planned exit from their home, or practice it, he said.

"I can't tell you the amount of times we've pulled up to fires and family members say, 'I'm not sure if they're out or not,'" Bashir said.

Much of the instruction during fire prevention week is for children of elementary school age or younger, and it's geared at a level they can understand. Firefighters will also put on their full gear including helmet, mask and air tank so the kids can see them.

"Because there's actually been times children have hidden from firefighters," Bashir said. "Depending on the age, we can look scary at times, with all our equipment and they can hear the air."

The Nottingham Fire Company hosted an inside view of fire and fire suppression last night, with a live burn trailer starting a blaze and then extinguishing it. Hosted by the cooperative New Jersey Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board, organizers aimed to show attendees not only how a fire starts and grows, but the effectiveness with which sprinklers can put it out.

The only things burning at the county's Family Fun and Safety Day at Mercer County Park Saturday will likely be hot dogs, however. From noon to 3 p.m., fire trucks and vehicles like the sheriff's office's Mobile Communications Vehicle will be available for families to see. Visitors will also be able to get information on fire prevention.

"I encourage you to practice your fire escape plans several times each year," County Executive Brian Hughes said, "but if that is not possible, use Fire Prevention Week and The Great American Fire Drill as your reminder that the more familiar you are with your family's plan, the better your chances of escaping a fire."

Any family's best defense against a fire is a smoke detector, and many residents can obtain one free. In Trenton, residents can call fire headquarters at (609) 989-4038, request a detector and arrange a time for firefighters to come.

"Because we will actually install the smoke detector and make sure it's installed properly and it's in a key location," Bashir said.

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