

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

# SAFETY

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PRE SENIOR SUMMIT WORK GROUP  
READ AHEAD PAPER



# **SAFETY**

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## **SENIOR AGENDA**

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Vision: Montgomery County will provide physical, financial and technological protection and safety for older adults.

- The County will expand its police and fire safety programs targeted toward older adults.
- The County will educate both older adults and their caregivers about the potential for financial crimes, including telephone and computer scams.
- The County's Ombudsman Program will increase its monitoring of the safety of group homes and assisted living facilities.
- The County will work to assure legal protection from financial exploitation of older adults.

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## **BACKGROUND**

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A 2011 survey of County seniors conducted by the Safety workgroup (Fire and Rescue, Police, Consumer Protection, and Homeland Security) found that 85% of respondents felt safe in the County. Concerns included identity theft, door-to-door solicitations. Police identified mixed use housing as potential crime locations.

Overall, Montgomery County has a low crime rate and is a very safe place to live. However, issues facing seniors continue to include all types of scams, e.g., phone and door-to-door, as well as pickpocketing. Elopement is an issue for people with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia: The County is informing caregivers about available resources and the importance of calling 911 timely. And, increasingly, seniors are accessing social media and list serves, offering improved opportunity for time-sensitive safety information.

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## SELECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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### **Invested in Fire & Rescue Facilities, Operations and Personnel; Reduced Response Times**

- Since 2009, Montgomery County built five fire-rescue stations to address emerging and continuing needs, i.e., new Fire Station 22 – Germantown / Kingsview (2009), new Fire Station 34 - Germantown/Milestone (2010), rebuilt Fire Station 2 - Takoma Park (2010), new Fire Station 32 - Travilah (2014) and rebuilt Wheaton Rescue Squad (2014) at a new site.
- This compares with 2 new fire stations built or renovated over previous 12 years, i.e., Fire Station 1 in Silver Spring (2006) and Fire Station 35 in Clarksburg (interim station opened 2005).
- In the last decade, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) began assigning firefighter paramedics to Engines and Aerial Units, enabling MCFRS to quickly dispatch four personnel, including a paramedic, to the scene of fires and critical emergency medical calls. Today, there are 28 Paramedic Engines and one Paramedic Aerial Tower in service.
- Reduced response times: In the context of this improved investment in facilities, operations and personnel, response times for advanced life support (ALS) have improved throughout the County. Quicker response times translate into lives protected and saved:
  - o Looking at *average* response times to ALS incidents, between FY09 and FY15, such response times improved by:
    - 1% in urban areas
    - 8% in suburban areas
    - 25% in rural areas
- Excellence in definitive intervention for heart attack victims: Also in the context of these investments in personnel, operations and facilities, and in cooperation with hospital partners, MCFRS is meeting or exceeding national standards in stroke and heart attack care. For example, in October 2015, from the time of the 911 call, MCFRS was able to transport stroke and heart attack patients to the emergency department door in an average of 33 minutes. The American Heart Association has identified an ambitious goal of 90 minutes from time of 911 call to definitive intervention for heart attack victims: MCFRS excels in this category, which translates into lives saved.

## **Promoted Fire Safety Among Seniors**

- While the overall fire death rate in Montgomery County is one of the lowest in the country, senior citizens have been disproportionately represented. In 2008, the County Executive convened the Senior Citizen Fire Safety Task Force, which was charged with identifying effective strategies to improve fire safety among seniors in Montgomery County.
- Through the implementation of Task Force recommendations, fire fatalities among seniors have fallen from an average of five per year from 2005-2007 to an average of two per year from 2008-2014.
- The Task Force identified 37 recommendations. One of the most successful recommendations implemented has been the fire department's home safety program in which fire department representatives make house calls to senior citizens and persons with disabilities to check smoke alarms, identify and correct any potential safety risks and ensure that the resident has a home fire escape plan. Using an appointment-based scheduling system, the department has visited more than 1,000 senior homes in the first ten months of the program and over 90% of the residential homes visited lacked proper smoke alarm protection.
- Fire and Rescue personnel work closely with communities, neighborhood organizations and residential building managers to develop fire evacuation and escape plans. Additionally, MCFRS provides "fire safety awareness" training to organizations that interact with underserved and "at risk" seniors in their home – educating them on the importance of working smoke alarms and to convey important educational information to their clients on common heating and cooking practices to prevent fires.

## **Expanded Crime Prevention Services; Locating At-Risk Seniors**

- In 2009, MCPD launched "Keeping Seniors Safe" crime prevention outreach program. Keeping Seniors Safe addresses financial and other frauds and scams; identity theft; shopping safety; and emergency preparedness. With presentations from Community Outreach Officers and command staff, and brochures distributed widely, the program reaches thousands of seniors each year.
- MCPD Officers continued to conduct home security surveys in seniors' homes.
- MCPD Officers also manage Project Lifesaver to help locate seniors with Alzheimer's disease.

**Continued growth of the Montgomery County Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse Task Force (EVAATF).** Representatives from the Montgomery County Police Department, the State’s Attorney’s Office, Adult Protective Services, County Attorney’s Office, Ombudsman and Licensing and Regulation work together, in partnership with Department of Health and Human Services, to prevent elder abuse, raise public awareness, support legislative efforts to establish stronger and better laws, and aggressively investigate and prosecute those who commit elder abuse.

- In 2014, **the State’s Attorney’s Office**, in order to meet the needs of our growing senior population (a 113% estimated growth between 2010 and 2040), created the Crimes Against Seniors and Vulnerable Adults Unit to aggressively prosecute crimes against seniors, including physical abuse, financial exploitation and neglect. This unit includes two specialized Assistant State Attorneys and a Program Manager to track all incidents of elder abuse in Montgomery County.
- In 2013, the **Montgomery County Police Department** enhanced the investigative capacity of their Elder Abuse Section, adding 6 detectives.
- **Adult Protective Services** added funds (FY15) for a Social Worker to address growing investigations of financial exploitation resulting from new mandatory bank reporting requirements. In FY14, there were 776 Adult Protective Services investigations.
- The **Long Term Care Ombudsman Program** (FY15) was expanded by restoring a Full time Program Manager position with County funds that was previously eliminated due to grant reductions. The Ombudsman program helps protect 7,700+ County residents in 190 assisted living facilities and 34 nursing homes (FY15) by maintaining a regular presence, investigating complaints and advocating for seniors rights.
- Over the past year, our **EVAATF** partners have provided expanded outreach and education in the area of elder abuse prevention through World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (attended by over 300 seniors), through wide radio, TV and cable coverage, and through presence at senior fairs, expos, and faith community gatherings. **EVAATF** also worked with County PIO to publicize elder abuse reporting resources in and on Ride-On buses.
- **EVAATF** has presented a national program, entitled “Money Smart for Older Adults,” to hundreds of seniors throughout the county, including presentations in Spanish.

## **Promoted Emergency Planning and Preparedness:**

- Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (OEMHS) continues to deliver preparedness messages throughout the County, educating seniors about how to be better prepared for an emergency.
- Senior preparedness brochures were distributed at the OEMHS table at nine large events during 2015, including events specifically for seniors (50+ Employment Expo, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day).
- Addressed senior issues, among others, as part of the Personal Preparedness Initiative with MWCOG.
- Partnered with MCFRS to present both disaster preparedness and fire safety messages at several senior communities.
- Distributed preparedness brochures at several other meetings and presentations.
- During 2015, over 1,430 senior preparedness brochures and 1,260 access and functional needs workbooks have been distributed.
- Using U.S. Census data and GIS mapping to identify populations within the County that might be particularly vulnerable to certain hazards in order to improve response during disasters and/or emergencies.

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## **CHALLENGES**

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The County aims to ensure that aging residents have adequate safety protections. Many of the challenges listed below already are being addressed by the County, but may need increased resources to adequately satisfy the needs and the preferences of the growing senior population and their families.

- Meeting the needs of seniors and citizens with access and functional needs by ensuring the best possible emergency messaging (via Alert Montgomery, Twitter, and Facebook).
- Ensuring seniors that live alone, especially those without family or a support network in the community, are able to be reached with emergency notifications and can also reach out for assistance when normal channels (phone/internet) are down.
- Seniors lacking ability to access social media for important public safety messages
- Potential increased incidence of fraud and scams crime as the senior population grows

- Physical and mental impairments that can contribute significantly to senior citizens' inability to react effectively to fire safety threats. While the education of seniors, their families, caregivers and others around them is a major factor in their well-being, inherent building features, approved fire detection and suppression systems and pre-emergency planning continue to be a major element in preventing senior citizen fire injuries and fatalities.
  
- Adult Protective Services continues to address the substantial growth in guardianship cases, with increases in financial exploitation leading the way:
  - New Guardianships increased 54% FY13 to FY15 (Total Public Guardianships @ 115)
  - Guardian of Property cases increased by 200% over last 2 fiscal years.
  
- Adult Protective Services, State's Attorney's Office and police investigations are on the rise. For example, in FY15, Adult Protective Services investigated more than 750 cases, including self-neglect (most reported), financial exploitation (second most reported) and nearly 200 cases of physical or sexual neglect and/or abuse.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION STEPS

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Opportunities available to Montgomery County Government to address challenges include, but are not limited to:

- Promote safety messages to Seniors at every available opportunity
- Develop a program to reach the senior population that does not use the internet or social media to get information.
- Provide public service announcements and highlight example cases with the media to help educate people about how to avoid becoming a victim
- Provide information to caregivers regarding public safety resources they can access to help keep their loved one safe
- Initiate a public education and awareness campaign to encourage the installation of up-to-date residential smoke alarms in residential properties, with special emphasis on seniors living independently throughout Montgomery County.
- Identify and provide information to homebound seniors and those with disabilities regarding fire safety. Provide assistance with installation of approved smoke alarms appropriate to senior needs, e.g., alarms linked to visual and/or tactile alerting devices, long-life alarms and other new and emerging technologies.