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Free Smoke and CO Alarm Program Could Protect Bristol Homeowners As High-Risk Winter Season Arrives

(December 26, 2017) – Last week’s tragic house fire that destroyed a local residence and put its owner in the hospital with severe burns is a stark reminder that the risk of structure fires greatly increases during the winter months. Whether the cause is faulty Christmas tree ornaments, flammable materials next to heaters, or accidental ignition of heating fuels, cold weather situations increase the odds of a fire starting. The Bristol Fire Department went on over 2,300 calls last year with many of those in the winter months. Even though over 93% of those fires are held to minimal damage, there is still an estimated loss totaling more than \$1.25 million.

The home destroyed last week is still being evaluated for the cause but one thing for certain is that it didn’t have any smoke alarms installed. Unfortunately, Bristol’s history of these types of fires is filled with tragedy. In 2014-2015, four fatalities resulted from fires in homes without smoke detectors.

“Fires don’t care what time of year it is or who it affects. The best way to fight a fire is prevention,” said Bristol Fire Chief Jay Kolakoski. “Because cold weather affects everyone, we really encourage people to take advantage of a program we have that could give any Bristol resident a new fire or carbon monoxide (CO) alarm and our firefighters will come free of charge to provide the alarms and actually install them.”

The City of Bristol has been fortunate to be the recipient of two grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) concluded that the Bristol Fire Department (BFD) is well equipped and trained to respond to the needs of the community. Especially with regard to the fire prevention program, the report noted that the City was successfully targeting commercial properties but stated that, “the BFD needs to target their public fire education efforts at high-risk populations and older buildings within the City.” Residential fires occur most frequently in the dense, older sections of the City in areas primarily filled with modest single-family and multi-family homes.

Fatal fire events such as these have a devastating impact on a community, as well as on the families, neighbors, and fire personnel involved in the rescue efforts. The BFD is determined to address the lack of smoke alarms in older homes and to ramp up their efforts to make sure there are functioning alarms in every home through an educational campaign and the Smoke Detector Distribution Program.

With a generous grant from FEMA, the City has 10-year lithium battery smoke detectors available for free to homeowners who request them. Fire personnel will install as many smoke detectors as are needed in the home, usually three. One of these may include a CO detector as well, if the home has an oil heating system. These units will be installed free of charge upon appointment with the BFD. Call 860-584-7964 ext. 4 between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 to schedule an appointment. Fire personnel from the station closest to your address will arrange to visit your home at a time convenient to you.

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***About the Bristol Development Authority.** The Bristol Development Authority (BDA) works to improve the physical, economic, and social environment of the Bristol community by serving as the primary governmental organization dedicated to promoting commercial development, to preserving and improving the City's housing stock, and to securing and administering the resources required to carry out these goals. The BDA is overseen by an appointed nine-member Board of Commissioners which governs economic and community development policies for the City. For more information, log onto www.bristolallheart.com or by email to bda@bristolct.gov.*