

International Students and Fire Safety Awareness: An initiative towards meeting the challenge of community, industry and cultural expectations

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Abstract

In January 2008, three Indian students died in a house fire in Footscray, a suburb of Melbourne. This tragedy shook the International Education Industry, Australia's fastest growing and third largest export industry. The industry as a whole attempted to come to terms with this tragedy while being confronted with the Melbourne media depicting graphic images of the host family, neighbours and friends grieving for the students. As a result of this tragedy and subsequent heightened awareness within the tertiary education sector of fire risks associated with student accommodation, the MFB took the initiative to work towards tackling fire safety issues faced by tertiary students, in particular international students. The goal was to establish stakeholder partnerships to work towards educating and improving the personal safety of students. Throughout 2008, this award winning initiative was transformed into ongoing collaboration between MFB and a broad range of key stakeholders within the tertiary education and accommodation sectors.

This presentation will begin by sketching the backdrop to the student fire safety initiative detailing the elements of the international education industry and the high risk nature of the living conditions of many international students. The presentation will then proceed to reveal the partnerships that were formed with a broad range of organizations, education providers, and private and public sector representatives, and in doing so, recount the process in developing these partnerships. This paper will highlight the importance of these partnerships, and the importance of determining, addressing and ultimately meeting the expectations of all stakeholders. The conclusion of the paper will seek to illustrate the paramount role that understanding each other's strengths and limitations has played in achieving successful outcomes throughout this initiative and the ways in which the lessons learned here can be applied to future initiatives and collaborations.