

**S.A.F.E.R.  
(Seeking Aid From Every Resident)**

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An Overview

S.A.F.E.R. (Seeking Aid From Every Resident) is a policing program created by Chief Michael Harnishfeger of the Ada, Ohio Police Department in 2001. The essence of S.A.F.E.R. is to constantly remind and encourage residents of their role in making their community a safer place and to reward community residents when they do participate in making their community a safer place to live.

Understanding that local police jurisdictions are comprised of too few police officers, it is incumbent on residents to take an active role in the safety and security of their own neighborhoods and communities, and to partner with local law enforcement in this endeavor. S.A.F.E.R. does not break any new barriers of program designs but rather attempts to combine many elements of successful endeavors into one program model. The program name, S.A.F.E.R. offers a great way to capitalize on name recognition and to create an association of duty with the name; in other words, when the public hears the word safer or observes a public S.A.F.E.R. sign, they will come to know that their community is only safer when they take an active role by partnering with local law enforcement.

The details of the S.A.F.E.R. project are where the differences are most observable and set it apart from other policing programs; S.A.F.E.R. becomes an all-encompassing policing program within a community and engenders a sense of duty and responsibility with those we serve. In order to create this sense of duty and to constantly remind residents of their responsibility to their community, the S.A.F.E.R. program utilizes name recognition, signs and frequency of use to promote law enforcement and community partnership. For example, attaching S.A.F.E.R. to your local child education programs and calling the program S.A.F.E.R. Kids teaches our children from early on of their duty to their community; community alerts are called S.A.F.E.R. Alerts to get the attention of our residents in requesting their assistance or by putting them on alert for a specific issue; recognition of substantial crime tips or community aid is called S.A.F.E.R. Awards which should be unique to your local community; the S.A.F.E.R. sign is shaped as a shield and is different than any other street sign to stimulate symbol recognition and continually generate the idea of “keeping my city safer”.

These various uses of the S.A.F.E.R. word and acronym as well as posting signs within the community are a continual reminder to the public of the community partnership and goal of keeping a community safer.

S.A.F.E.R. utilizes the following program sub-attributes to combine in making an overall effective S.A.F.E.R. program:

- S.A.F.E.R. Committee
- S.A.F.E.R. Signs
- S.A.F.E.R. Paper
- S.A.F.E.R. Alerts
- S.A.F.E.R. Kids
- S.A.F.E.R. Awards

## **S.A.F.E.R. Committee**

The S.A.F.E.R. Committee is an important element of the program as it brings together various representatives of the community, including: law enforcement, colleges/schools, business, government and members of the public. The S.A.F.E.R. Committee should be comprised of participants who represent the different elements of your local community or district. The committee should meet as needed to discuss program issues, direction of the program, award nominations and selection, and S.A.F.E.R. Kids programs.

The make up of the committee should reflect the general diversity of the community and the different elements, i.e., business, industry, schools, etc. which work together for the common good of the community. The committee should be invited to attend all award presentations and community events that surround the S.A.F.E.R. program. This committee should demonstrate the effectiveness of all segments of society working together to keep our communities safer.

The S.A.F.E.R. Committee should be organized and lead by the local police chief or designee as the law enforcement leader holds ultimate responsibility for the safety and security of the public and this leadership should demonstrate to the community the aspiration of the local law enforcement agency to proactively reduce and solve criminal and nuisance issues within the neighborhoods.

## **S.A.F.E.R. Signs**

The S.A.F.E.R. sign is placed in different parts of the community for high visibility and as a constant reminder to the residents. Strategic locations should include parks, stadiums, public swimming pools, schools, government offices and various locations as street signs. The top right hand corner of this letter displays the shape of the sign which is different from any current signage and is in the form of a shield by design. The jurisdiction name is placed at the top of the sign to publicly declare your city - a S.A.F.E.R. city.

## **S.A.F.E.R. Paper**

The S.A.F.E.R. Paper is a monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly newsletter which is put out by the lead agency to keep the residents abreast of issues facing the community, to introduce agency personnel to grow the agency's relationships within the community, to announce S.A.F.E.R. Kids events, to make notifications of S.A.F.E.R. Awards if appropriate and generally, a newsletter to bring the agency and community closer together by the sharing of information. In some cases, advertising can be sold within the S.A.F.E.R. Paper to assist in funding the program as needed.

## **S.A.F.E.R. Alerts**

Just as an Amber Alert is issued for a missing child, the S.A.F.E.R. Alert is used to reach out to the community to alert them to a specific issue facing our community – remember the acronym is doing just that, Seeking Aid From Every Resident. The S.A.F.E.R. Alert is used sparingly so as not to create a sense of complacency within the community but rather issued only as needed for topics of significant importance for the public's safety. An example of a S.A.F.E.R. Alert may be to reach out to the community for assistance in solving a particular crime, alerting residents of a serious crime, scam or issue within the community. The most recent S.A.F.E.R. Alert in Ada, Ohio was issued to generate tips from the community to locate a home invasion suspect.

## **S.A.F.E.R. Kids**

Many agencies engage community children in a number of safety related educational opportunities and events including bike rodeos, fingerprinting, school safety talks, internet safety meetings, fire safety and other important safety topics. By attaching the S.A.F.E.R. Kids program name to your event, you are again planting the seed of community involvement even at a very early age. The S.A.F.E.R. Kids program carries with it a nice symbol and name that associates our goal as well – keeping our kids safer and as a collective effort of the community, keeping our community safer. As an example, in Ada, Ohio we visit our 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes 4 weeks in a row to discuss firearms safety, fire safety, internet safety and other topics, calling the program S.A.F.E.R. Kids.

## **S.A.F.E.R. Awards**

In Ada, Ohio one of our greatest assets and known nationally for our role in the National Football League is the only NFL football factory in the United States. Every football that is produced for the NFL is produced locally in Ada, Ohio. The S.A.F.E.R. Award should be an item that is produced locally and is specific to your community if possible. The Ada S.A.F.E.R. Award is an NFL Football with our S.A.F.E.R. Logo on one of the panels of the football along with the recipient's name. The S.A.F.E.R. Award should be presented to residents who have contributed substantially to the safety and security of your city. Understanding that there are folks who will not want nor should be recognized publicly, all that contribute in a significant way should be presented with the S.A.F.E.R. Award, even privately as appropriate.

In the past the Ada S.A.F.E.R. Committee has authorized S.A.F.E.R. Awards for crime tips, substantial community involvement by our university in providing housing and meals in times of community disaster, and to folks who have addressed quality of life issues in a substantial way leading to a safer community.

As a result of our careful consideration of the S.A.F.E.R. Award, the Wilson's Football has become a desired item within the community and an award that is really appreciated. The Wilson's Sporting Goods is a member of the S.A.F.E.R. Committee representing our Ada businesses – a great fit.

## **Leadership**

Now that I have covered the elements of S.A.F.E.R. I think that it is critically important to write about the leadership of the S.A.F.E.R. Program.

Many of us have traveled to cities anywhere in the United States and have observed the various crime watch or neighborhood watch signs that have grown old and faded. As an observer of those signs, one could easily surmise that not only is the sign forgotten, but the program which it represents is probably old, faded and forgotten. Neither the good citizen nor the criminal have any faith that true crime watch or community partnerships are happening.

Leadership does not let the program grow old and become forgotten. The S.A.F.E.R. program can not be instituted and handed over to a committee to keep going – leadership must come from the agency that is responsible for community safety and leadership requires the agency director to insist on a continual S.A.F.E.R. innovation and advancement.

Whenever there is an opportunity to mention S.A.F.E.R., through S.A.F.E.R. Alerts, S.A.F.E.R. Kids, S.A.F.E.R. Paper, S.A.F.E.R. Awards and even our S.A.F.E.R. Signs, the public will continue to see that the idea of a safer community abounds and importantly, so will the criminals. If the bad guys believe that someone is watching or community participants are willing to join the fight against crime then there is a real chance that he or she will choose to do the criminal enterprise somewhere else or hopefully nowhere else.

The agency leader must insist that S.A.F.E.R. is used at every opportunity and that folks are rewarded for their participation, even privately as appropriate.

In Ada, Ohio we made it a point to establish a S.A.F.E.R. Declaration at the beginning of our program wherein all of the committee members signed the Declaration and posted them in their halls. In order to keep our S.A.F.E.R. program fresh and new, this Declaration was signed after 5 years by the S.A.F.E.R. Committee to “renew” our commitment to a S.A.F.E.R. community.

When a sign becomes faded, so does the program – keeping the sign fresh and new should be a signal to everyone that S.A.F.E.R. is a way of life for a community that desires to remain a safer community and only quality leadership will ensure that the safety of his or her community is not just a faded dream.

In 2003 the S.A.F.E.R. program was awarded the Ohio Community Policing Strategy of the Year by the Ohio Crime Prevention Association and in Ada, Ohio we believe very strongly that Ada is in fact a safer community because of the continued participation of our residents through the S.A.F.E.R. program.

The S.A.F.E.R. program is available for use throughout our nation’s communities, we simply ask that agencies who intend on implementing S.A.F.E.R. make contact with Chief Michael Harnishfeger of the Ada Police Department so that we may track the agencies and communities who have adopted this policing strategy.

Further questions or requests for speaking engagements may be addressed to:

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