

Working to Keep You Safe Before the Emergency Happens

By Ashley Turner

Keeping our community safe does not start when sirens sound. It starts long before. Charlotte County Fire & EMS is dedicated to protecting lives not only during emergencies but also by helping residents prepare for them. Through outreach programs, safety education, and community partnerships, the department works every day to make sure homes are safer, families are informed, and responders can act quickly when seconds matter.

Smoke detectors save lives. The average time to safely exit a home filling with smoke is just two minutes. Those moments matter. Working smoke detectors give you the early warning you need to get out safely and call 911.

Charlotte County Fire & EMS offers a free smoke detector program to help residents stay protected. Firefighters will visit your home to check existing detectors, replace batteries, and install non-electric, ten-year battery-operated detectors that you provide. During the visit, they also share safety tips and information on caring for your smoke detectors and using fire extinguishers.

It's a simple step that makes a huge difference. Smoke detectors are your first line of defense, and we want to make sure everyone in our community has that protection.

To schedule an appointment, email PSinfo@CharlotteCountyFL.gov or call 941-833-5600. Please include your name, address, phone number, and the number of smoke detectors in your home.

When emergencies happen, seconds count. Being prepared can make all the difference. That is the idea behind the Red Dot Medical Information Program, created by Charlotte County Fire & EMS, Punta Gorda Fire Department, Englewood Fire Department, the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office, and the Punta Gorda Police Department.

When you call 911, responders need to know your medical history, allergies, medications, and emergency contacts. In a crisis, you might not be able to communicate or remember that information. The Red Dot Program helps solve that problem by letting you fill out a simple medical information form before an emergency occurs.

The form is stored in a visible Red Dot packet in your home, giving responders immediate access when they arrive. It helps them provide faster and safer care when you need it most. Red Dot packets can be picked up at any of the participating agencies.

Another simple way to help first responders find you quickly is through the Reflective Address Sign Program. These reflective signs make the address on your mailbox visible day or night, helping crews locate your home faster in an emergency. To learn more or place an order, visit CharlotteCountyFL.gov/ccfems.

For property owners, access is another key part of emergency readiness. The Knox-Box® Rapid Entry System provides secure emergency access to buildings and gated communities. Property owners can store entrance keys, access cards, and floor plans in high-security Knox-Boxes mounted near building entrances. Only local first responders have access, allowing them to enter without damage or delay.

Beyond emergency response, Charlotte County Fire & EMS takes pride in being part of the community. Firefighters and public education staff love connecting with residents, whether it is visiting schools, attending festivals, or giving fire safety talks at homeowner associations and community meetings. It is all part of the department's mission to build a safer, stronger Charlotte County. These programs reflect the department's ongoing commitment to safety, education, and prevention. By preparing before an emergency, residents help first responders act faster and protect lives.

For more information, visit CharlotteCountyFL.gov/ccfems or contact Charlotte County Fire & EMS Public Information Office at 941-833-5600.

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