

Fighting fires before they start

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Fires are common in informal settlements, but residents of Flamingo Heights in Lansdowne have a better chance of surviving the next one.

They were given fire extinguishers and smoke detectors last Thursday and City firefighters advised them how to prevent and fight fires.

More than 100 households in Flamingo Heights will benefit from this project run by the City's Fire and Rescue Service and Project Network South Africa (ProNetSA), a non-profit that helps poor communities.

Called Operation Quench, it was launched in May last year to prevent fire-related deaths in informal settlements.

The plan is to hand out fire extinguishers to 146 000 households across more than 430 informal settlements.

According to Israel Ogundare from ProNet SA, one shack can be completely engulfed by fire within a minute.

"While it can be difficult to get firefighters to assist during a fire outbreak in informal settlements, Operation Quench will equip vulnerable communities with an on-the-spot fire response communal team," he said.

Sylwin Rossouw, from Fire and Rescue said they would use Expanded Public Works Pro-



■ Sylwin Rossouw, from Fire and Rescue's public education section, explains how an extinguisher works.

gramme (EPWP) workers to help with monitoring.

"We have a database, now we can monitor and see over a period of six months whether this initiative has made an impact.

"We could not monitor or evaluate before this. Now we will be able to do our statistics from our side, and will get statistics from the EPWP workers.

"Although the smoke alarms won't be able to be tampered with, it will be inevitable that we will get false alarms. The EPWP workers will be able to notify us of a false alarm.

"I explained to the residents that it would probably be best to keep the smoke alarms in the bedrooms, as there is a lot of steam in the kitchen, and hookah (oka)

pipes and vapes, which produce a lot of smoke, will also trigger it," Mr Rossouw said.

Resident Rachel van der Berg, said the initiative would be beneficial.

"It will definitely help. There was almost a fire last night. I remember we had a big fire in 2013, and it was a very difficult time for us all. It happened a week before Christmas, and with inflation, it just becomes more and more difficult to replace things you've lost in the fire," she said.

Derrick Solomons, another resident, agrees with Ms Van der Berg.

"There are many small children here, and it can help us to prevent fires from spreading. The smoke alarms will help, especially if you are passed out from having one



■ Flamingo Heights residents with smoke detectors and fire extinguishers they received.



■ Phumza Tshibo and Sidney Prins at the information table.

too many. If your alarm goes off, at least your neighbour will be able to assist if you can't hear it. Also, I hope none of the residents will

now think of selling their smoke alarms or fire extinguishers. People must be held accountable for it," he said.