

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

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INTERNATIONAL FIRE SAFETY WEEK 2026

CONCEPT NOTE

Theme: *Building Resilient Communities: Collaborative Strategies for Fire Risk Reduction*

Dates: 7 – 11 October 2026

Venue: Parking in front of City of Windhoek, Independence Avenue

Host: Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Division

1. Introduction

Fire incidents remain one of the most persistent threats facing communities in Windhoek, particularly in rapidly growing informal settlements. The combination of closely spaced dwellings, combustible building materials, fire-load content inside dwellings, and limited infrastructure creates an environment where fires can escalate within minutes, often leaving widespread destruction in their wake.

The consequences of these incidents extend far beyond the immediate loss of property. Fire outbreaks frequently result in the displacement of families, loss of personal belongings, interruption of livelihoods, and, in severe cases, injury or loss of life. Many affected residents are already experiencing economic hardship and often lack adequate insurance or financial resources to recover from such disasters. As a result, fires can deepen poverty, increase dependence on social assistance, and undermine the overall wellbeing and resilience of vulnerable communities.

In many of these areas, challenges such as restricted access for emergency response vehicles, lack of bulk water networks and points (fire-hydrants), and limited firebreaks significantly hinder effective response and firefighting activities. At the same time, everyday practices such as unsafe and illegal electrical connections, overloaded circuits, and open-flame cooking continue to increase the likelihood of fire outbreaks.

The impact of fires also places considerable pressure on municipal services. Significant resources are required for emergency response, temporary shelter provision, humanitarian assistance, debris removal, infrastructure rehabilitation, and community recovery efforts. Frequent fire incidents divert critical resources from other service delivery priorities, placing additional strain on municipal budgets and operational capacity.

Recognising these realities, the City of Windhoek introduced International Fire Safety Week in 2024 as a platform to promote awareness, preparedness, and engagement. Building on the momentum of previous editions, the 2026 programme will place stronger emphasis on community-level resilience, practical interventions, and coordinated action among stakeholders to prevent and reduce fire risks, protect lives and property, and support sustainable community development.

2. Why This Initiative Matters

Despite ongoing response efforts, many fire incidents remain preventable. A key challenge lies in the gap between emergency response and everyday prevention practices at household and community level and external stakeholder involvement.

International Fire Safety Week 2026 seeks to address this gap by shifting focus toward collaboration, shared responsibility, and continuous education. The initiative will:

- Encourage communities to take an active role in reducing fire risks
- Promote practical, easy-to-adopt safety measures at household level
- Support firefighters and emergency personnel through recognition and engagement
- Strengthen partnerships between the municipality, private sector, and communities
- Contribute to reducing fire-related losses across the city

3. Core Programme Focus: Expanding Practical Fire Prevention Measures

A key feature of the 2026 programme will be the continued rollout of targeted fire prevention solutions, particularly in high-risk communities.

Smoke Alarm Distribution and Community Education

Through sponsorship funding received during the past two years of International Fire Safety Week (IFSW), the Windhoek Fire Brigade Services has procured battery-operated smoke alarms for distribution in vulnerable communities. These smoke alarms form part of an ongoing fire safety intervention aimed at reducing fire-related losses, particularly in informal settlements.

In addition to the installation and distribution of smoke alarms, continuous fire safety education and awareness programmes are being conducted within informal settlement communities. These educational initiatives focus on fire prevention, safe household practices, emergency preparedness, and the importance of early detection and evacuation.

Battery-operated smoke alarms are being distributed to selected households to serve as an early warning system in the event of a fire. Early detection is critical in reducing response times, enabling safer evacuation, and minimizing injuries, fatalities, and property damage. By combining community education with practical fire safety measures, the programme seeks to build more resilient communities and significantly curb fire losses in high-risk areas. For pilot monitoring and evaluation purposes, a selected segment and clustered location in Goreangab, will receive 50 smoke detectors.

4. Strengthening Community Knowledge and Ownership

In 2026, greater attention will be given to direct engagement within informal settlements. The focus will not only be on providing resources, but also on equipping residents with the knowledge and skills to reduce risks in their own environments.

Planned activities include:

- Hands-on demonstrations of fire prevention techniques
- Identification of common household fire hazards and how to address them

- Guidance on safe cooking and electrical practices
- Training on the use and maintenance of smoke alarms
- Awareness on the benefits and correct use of fire-retardant paint

This approach aims to foster a sense of shared responsibility and empower communities to become active participants in fire prevention.

5. Objectives

The 2026 International Fire Safety Week is guided by the following objectives:

- To improve awareness and understanding of fire risks and prevention methods
- To strengthen preparedness at household and community level
- To highlight the capabilities and readiness of Fire Brigade Services
- To expand practical interventions in high-risk areas
- To build and sustain partnerships that support long-term fire risk reduction
- Hosting of the inaugural Toughest Firefighter Alive Namibia national competition
- Participation from multiple local authorities across the country
- Activities promoting fitness, resilience, and operational excellence
- Recognition of outstanding performance and dedication within the firefighting profession

6. Key Activities

6.1 Community and Educational Engagement

- Open days at the parking in front of City of Windhoek, Independence Avenue, including guided tours and public engagement activities
- Exhibitions by stakeholders and industry partners showcasing fire safety equipment, technologies, and services
- Outreach and fire safety education programmes in informal settlements and other high-risk communities
- Live demonstrations of firefighting, rescue, and emergency response operations
- Practical demonstrations on smoke alarm installation and other fire prevention measures

- Distribution and installation of battery-operated smoke alarms as an early warning system to reduce fire losses
- School fire safety art competition and educational activities
- Distribution of fire safety information and awareness materials
- Career awareness, recruitment, and professional engagement opportunities

6.2 Public Awareness and Participation

- Public awareness parade showcasing emergency services and partners
- Interactive community events with safety demonstrations and exhibitions
- Family-friendly activity zones to encourage broad participation
- Continued rollout of smoke alarms and fire-retardant paint in targeted communities

6.3 Additional Strategic Highlight: National Firefighter Competition

A key new feature of the 2026 programme will be the introduction of the inaugural Toughest Firefighter Alive Namibia competition, which will be hosted as part of International Fire Safety Week at the parking area in front of the City of Windhoek Townhouse, Independence Avenue.

In 2025, a smaller-scale internal firefighter challenge was successfully piloted, involving only Windhoek Fire Brigade personnel. Building on this success, the 2026 edition will expand significantly into a national-level event, with formal invitations extended to fire services from all local authorities and other brigades across Namibia.

The competition will test participants across a series of physically demanding and skill-based challenges designed to simulate real-life firefighting conditions, including strength, endurance, agility, and operational capability.

This initiative aims to:

- Promote firefighter fitness, health, and operational readiness
- Encourage professional excellence and peer learning across fire services
- Strengthen collaboration and camaraderie among emergency responders nationwide
- Provide a platform to recognise and celebrate the dedication and resilience of firefighters
- Increase public appreciation of the physical and mental demands of the profession

The inclusion of this national competition will significantly enhance the profile of International Fire Safety Week 2026, positioning it not only as a community-focused safety initiative, but also as a platform for professional development and national collaboration within the firefighting sector.

7. Anticipated Results

The 2026 programme is expected to contribute to:

- Increased awareness of fire risks and prevention strategies
- Improved readiness and response at community level
- Stronger collaboration between residents, emergency services and other stakeholders.
- Greater visibility and recognition of firefighting professionals
- Wider adoption of practical fire prevention measures
- Progress toward building more fire-resilient communities in Windhoek

8. Closing Statement

International Fire Safety Week 2026 (*Building Resilient Communities: Collaborative Strategies for Fire Risk Reduction*) represents an important step toward creating safer, more resilient communities. By combining education, practical and innovative solutions, and collaborative partnerships, the initiative aims to reduce fire risks and protect lives, homes, and livelihoods across the city.