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City Recognized Through National Award

Harrisonburg, VA – The City of Harrisonburg was recognized last week for a successful program that gets staff members out into the community and touches the lives of many children and their families each summer.

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) named Harrisonburg's "Risk Watch Summer Safety Program" as a recipient of the **Community Health and Safety Award** at its annual conference last week.

On Wednesday, September 17, Wanda Willis and Erin Stehle, both in the Fire Prevention Division with the Harrisonburg Fire Department, along with City Manager Kurt Hodgen accepted the award for a program that was started by the Harrisonburg Fire Department and has been cultivated over the years to spread safety messages throughout young children in our community.

"While our primary goal is to keep residents safe through public education campaigns such as this, it is always humbling to be awarded for those efforts," said City Manager Kurt Hodgen. "I commend the Harrisonburg Fire Department for developing the program and thank City Council for their continuous support of our overall public safety education efforts."

"Being recognized for such a positive program among other cities and counties throughout the country is truly an honor," said Wanda Willis. "It is exciting to be able to showcase our work to other communities in the hopes that they can take what we have learned and implement a similar program within another city."

Created in 2004, the Risk Watch Summer Safety Adventure takes place each year from June until August, when city staff travels from one neighborhood to another (primarily apartment and mobile home complexes) spreading information about bike safety, fire safety, weather preparedness, motor vehicle safety, and water safety. Through generous donations, grants, and volunteers, this program costs very little but can have a big impact on the participants.

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“We always want to measure the success of our department and the programs we coordinate but sometimes that is not an easy task,” said Fire Chief Larry Shifflett. “It is difficult to demonstrate and measure the calls that are not being made to 9-1-1 and the lives that have been saved because of a more educated citizenry through this safety program.”

If that measurement is only one life and only one phone call, the Risk Watch Summer Safety Program has been successful. Since the program started, nearly 10,000 kids and adults have participated.

More information about the Harrisonburg Fire Department and programs it offers is available at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov/fire.



Pictured above (left to right): Erin Stehle, Kurt Hodgen, Wanda Willis, and Bob O’Neill (ICMA Executive Director).

*The City of Harrisonburg is host to four **Harrisonburg Fire Department** stations. For more information about each fire station, visit www.HarrisonburgVA.gov/hfd-stations.*

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