

This Sunday, I had the honor of speaking at the 26th National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Service to pay tribute to those firefighters who lost their lives in the line of duty. On this occasion, we memorialized 91 fallen firemen and women, their deaths a grave testament to the dangerous and sometimes fatal nature of the fire service.

Every day, our volunteer and career firefighters provide an unbelievable service and sacrifice a great deal to protect our communities. In 2006, U.S. fire departments nationwide responded to 396,000 home fires. These fires caused 2,580 civilian deaths, 12,500 civilian injuries and \$6.8 billion in direct damage. Although tragic, these numbers would no doubt have been far greater were it not for the dedicated service of our first responders.

And we recall too, how on that fateful day of September 11, 2001, firefighters were among the first on the scene at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and in the fields outside Shanksville, Pennsylvania

. Their heroic efforts saved lives that day, but it is also what the firemen and women do on a daily basis that

defines the invaluable service they provide.

These brave protectors are responsible for leading both defensive and offensive efforts to ensure the safety of our homes and communities. They are the trained professionals ready to respond at the first sign of distress, and they are the front line in the event of an emergency.

The fire service also relies on public education campaigns to raise awareness about the measures citizens can take in safeguarding against fires in their homes and places of business. It can be said, after all, that there is no better protection against fires than the prevention of fires.

Every year, fire safety advocates make a big awareness push around National Fire Prevention Week – this year from October 7-13.

During this week, we join with our Nation's first responders to help prevent fires and ensure the safety of our homes and communities.

The focus of this year's campaign is on the importance of developing and practicing a fire escape plan for you and your family.

According to a poll by the National Fire Protection Association, only 66 percent have actually developed a home fire escape plan to ensure they could escape quickly and safely. And of those who have a plan, only 35 percent have actually practiced it. It is simply not enough to have a plan. You must be confident that it can be implemented. The National Fire

Protection Association has issued the following guidelines to use in developing a fire escape plan:

- Pull together everyone in your household and make a plan.
- Draw a floor plan or a map of your home showing all doors and windows, and mark two ways out of each room.

- If your home has two floors, every family member must be able to escape from the second floor rooms.

- Mark all of the smoke alarms. Smoke alarms should be in each sleeping room, outside each sleeping area, and on every level of the home.

- Make arrangements in your plan for anyone in your home who has a disability.

- Pick a family meeting place outside where everyone can meet. Ensure that responding emergency

personnel can find your home.

- Have everyone memorize the emergency phone number of the fire department.

- Remember to practice your plan at least twice a year, making the drill as realistic as possible.

For our part, Congress has, and will, continue to champion initiatives

to improve the safety and well being of our nation's firefighters and to enhance their ability to protect our communities. And as a Co-chair of the Congressional Fire Caucus, I will continue to work to ensure that our firefighters have the

staff, equipment and training that they need to keep their departments running safely and efficiently.

Finally, National Fire Prevention Week isn't just about fire safety. It is a tribute to the men and women who keep our communities safe from fire all year long. It is a tribute to the bravery and sacrifices of all those now waiting for the fire alarm to ring

in firehouses across our nation. The contributions of these heroes to ensuring the safety of their country and their communities cannot be overstated.

For more fire safety tips
and information on
National Fire
Prevention Week, you
can visit www.nfpa.org.