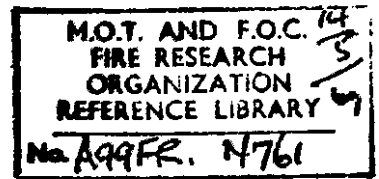


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**MOVEMENT OF VISITORS THROUGH A
HOME SAFETY EXHIBITION**

by

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MINISTRY OF TECHNOLOGY AND FIRE OFFICES' COMMITTEE
JOINT FIRE RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

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INTRODUCTION

Between 10th and 15th March 1969, a home safety exhibition was organised in St. Albans Town Hall by the St. Albans Home Safety Advisory Committee.

On a midweek afternoon, a sample of visitors was discreetly followed, to obtain an indication of which exhibits were most successful in attracting and holding their attention.

THE EXHIBITION

The town hall is situated in a very central position in the main shopping street. A rectangular area of about 170 m² (1800 ft²) was made available for the exhibition, together with about 10 m² (100 ft²) on the first floor landing.

Entrance was obtained through one or other of two street level doors, via a foyer and up a staircase. The exhibition was advertised outside by a banner at first floor level, and by notices (perhaps not very conspicuous) at the street level doors.

The 30 or so stands in the main circulating area were laid out in a straightforward way around the walls and in the centre of the floor. No particular sequence was indicated to visitors, and they left by the way they came in.

About 25 per cent of the exhibits were concerned with fire. Among the exhibitors were the Oil Appliance Manufacturers' Association, the Electrical Association for Women, two fire appliance manufacturers and the Home Safety Advisory Committee itself. This last had the largest stand and demonstrations of various kinds were taking place there most of the time.

The only other stand with an exhibitor in attendance for any length of time was that of the British Rheumatism and Arthritis Association.

Because of limited resources, the only literature available to be taken away was that provided by exhibitors; the OAMA was the only provider of non-brand-orientated fire prevention leaflets.

THE VISITORS

Groups of visitors entering the exhibition were kept under discreet observation. It had been hoped to record the time they spent looking at each stand, but this proved impracticable for one unaided observer. Neither was anything attempted in the way of 'exit interviews'.

The day in question was a wet Wednesday, and casual visitors were rather infrequent. Nine was the maximum number present at one time, at about 13.45 hrs. Some carried shopping baskets and seemed to have come in to escape the rain, others to have come in with the advance intention of studying everything in detail.

Two organised parties put in an appearance, comprising schoolgirls (attentive) and building trade apprentices (inattentive) respectively.

About 90 per cent of the visitors pursued a fairly systematic clockwise route round the stands, as was the organisers' intention. The lady at the British Rheumatism and Arthritis Association stand was successful in detaining most people for five minutes or so; otherwise the stand where people stopped longest was that of the Home Safety Advisory Committee, where the various safety experiments were being demonstrated.

One minor observation was that nearly every lady visitor looked inside a pram that was on display.

Nobody was seen to take away one of the OAMA leaflets, which were laid out on a table.

TIME VISITORS SPENT IN EXHIBITION

Table 1

Times at which typical groups of visitors entered and left exhibition

Sex/estimated age	Group of visitors						
	F45	F55)	M60	M55	M45)	M55	M40
		M35)			F40)		
		F30)					
Entered at	1315	1338	1415	1419	1443	1452	1506
Left at	1331	1402	1425	1427	1518	1506	1603
Time spent (min)	16	24	10	8	35	14	57

In the sample observed, the average (casual) visitor stayed nearly 25 min. The shortest stays were recorded when the demonstration stand was temporarily unmanned, and the longest by people discovered from their conversation to have some professional interest (e.g. hospital safety, gas engineering).

DISCUSSION

The exhibits, and the layout of the stands, seemed to be successful in keeping the attention of most visitors for a considerable period. However, the fairly indirect access from the street may have discouraged those people who might have stayed for shorter periods from entering.

This suggests that the average of the times spent there may not be the best measure of the total attractiveness of an exhibition of this kind, and that a figure representing say visitor-hr per day would be more appropriate. This could be further related to the floor area available for exhibits, or the rent (notional or actual) paid for it.

Two factors that it is felt may have induced people to prolong their stay on this particular afternoon were the peaceful atmosphere inside and the depressing weather outside. On adjacent stands, the objects displayed were often of entirely different character, and this variety appeal almost certainly helped to maintain interest.

CONCLUSIONS

Visitors to a home safety exhibition tended to spend an average of 25 minutes touring it; spending most time at those stands where somebody was in attendance.

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