

Communicating with the public about **wildland fire**:

A resource for practitioners to plan engagement strategies



This infographic summarizes recommendations from a review of 32 research studies about communicating with the public about wildland fire and smoke.¹

Recommendations were grouped into three categories:

- 1 the **process** of communication,
- 2 key **content** to include in messages, and
- 3 which **messengers** and communication **medium** to use:



How to use this document

Practitioners can use this document to brainstorm ways to engage in communication about wildland fire with the diverse people in areas where you work. The list of recommendations presented here is not exhaustive; rather, it is a starting point for consideration.

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¹Santo, Huber-Stearns, and Smith. Communicating with the public about wildland fire preparation, response, and recovery: A literature review of recent research with recommendations for managers. Ecosystem Workforce Program Working Paper # 109. Fall 2021. University of Oregon.



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Process (of communication)

Build understanding of, relationships with, and capacity to support communities' needs and priorities

This review identified **11 recommendations** for successfully engaging with the public about wildland fire and/or smoke:



- 1 Anticipate** and prepare for future obstacles
- 2 Continually learn** about local community and local meanings or ideas. Tailor communication and planning to local conditions, audiences, and decision-making processes
- 3 Create** processes for overcoming intractability
- 4 Reflect** on, learn from, and adapt in accordance with past experiences
- 5 Collaborate and partner** with others to increase capacity and ensure consistent messaging and communication strategies
- 6 Build** familiarity and relationships between fire personnel and communities (especially before fires)
- 7 Learn** about unevenness and inequities in the community and make a plan to reach vulnerable groups
- 8 Foster** creativity, discretion to act, and humility among local leadership
- 9 Engage** in interactions that are sincere, honest, genuine, friendly, open and realistic
- 10 Secure** sufficient upfront investments, resources, and institutional commitments
- 11 Use** available resources and toolkits



Message Content

Include key information in specific, clear, actionable, and relatable messages using appropriate tone

This review identified **seven recommendations** related to the specific content that communicators should include when engaging with the public about wildland fire and smoke.





Medium & Messenger

Engage and know your audience, especially who they trust and which information sources they use



This review identified **eight recommendations** related to strategic selection of communication medium and messengers:

- 1 Create** audience-specific communication
- 2 Leverage** social media to amplify simple messages, as a gateway to more complex information, and to promote interaction with audience
- 3 Communicate** via diverse media outlets for diverse audiences
- 4 Use** direct outreach approaches with vulnerable and at-risk populations
- 5 Share** information via news sources that members of the public are in the habit of using
- 6 Draw upon** interactive media to build relationships and mutual understanding
- 7 Utilize** existing citizen networks and individual “influencers” to disseminate messages
- 8 Engage** authoritative and trusted messengers to disseminate messages

The articles presented a wide variety of **ways to engage with the public** in communication about wildland fire and smoke.

Use this list of potential people, places, tools and strategies as a brainstorming tool to think through possible communication mechanisms that might be appropriate for your situation.

See list of ideas for
engaging strategies
on the next
page.

People and Places



Communication Tools, Activities, and Strategies



Brainstorm where and how to engage with the public about wildfire

Key Community Locations

- Schools (*athletic events, open houses, and other events that bring community together*)
- Healthcare, medical, nursing homes
- Libraries
- Local businesses
- Restaurants and hotels
- Visitor information centers
- Taxis/transportation shuttles
- Routine markets
- Festivals and other local events
- Public meetings
- Key employers specific to a local areas

Community Organizations

- Sporting clubs and groups
- Mothers' and play groups
- Book clubs
- Service clubs
- Religious groups
- Homeowner associations
- Chambers of commerce
- Humanitarian organizations

Government

- Local emergency management and fire authorities
- Local law enforcement
- County commissioners and other local government

Risk assessment / Planning

- Fire risk and hazard assessments for residents (*and personalized assessments for private property owners*)
- Community wildfire plans, bushfire survival plans, including evacuation plans and maps
- Monitoring data collection on private lands
- Fire risk and planning surveys of homeowners
- Government regulation and ordinances, including requirements for mitigation in the WUI
- Integrate fire into accreditation requirements at local health service
- Preparedness kits

Meetings and Events

- Public meetings, open houses, community and neighborhood meetings
- Interagency meetings between responsible government units
- Field trips, meetings in the field, and community tours
- Tours with local media outlets
- Public road shows and public speeches
- Tabling or presenting at public events
- Conferences

Media

- Radio
- TV and films
- Facebook, Twitter, social media posts or campaigns
- Newspaper and other print media
- Press conferences and daily briefings during incidents

Education

- Drills: simulation and evacuation
- Workshops and webinars
- Training courses
- School-based education programs
- Demonstration projects

Informative Resource

- Call-in number (*call center, 1-800 number, emergency hotline*)
- Brochures, flyers, pamphlets, factsheets
- Mobile applications and online resources such as blogs and interactive websites, electronic publications (*fire prevention/home protection*)
- White papers (*for policy makers, industry, etc.*)
- Maps of area risks, fire maps overlaid onto Google Earth
- Information about defensible space and fire-safe native plants that homeowners can plant
- List of emergency contact phone numbers
- Welcome bags for new residents, gift bags at events

Alerts/Warnings

- 'Reverse 911' system, target precise geographic areas and deliver in several languages
- Emergency Alert Systems broadcasts, alarms, and sirens
- Personalized alerts (*desktop/mobile computing systems*)

Communication Networks/Interpersonal Communication

- Conversations with incident management team representative
- Phone bank and personal phone calls
- Email listservs
- Personal and door to door visits for new residents and businesses
- Create county department communications programs for contacting industries

Advertising

- Signage in public and along roadways
- Stickers or cards in hired cars and vans
- Billboards and electronic reader signs
- Magnets with key phone numbers
- Printed materials in mail