



United States
Department
of Agriculture

Forest Service

Rocky Mountain
Research Station

Research Note
RMRS-RN-21-7-WWWW

September 2004

Fuels Planning: Science Synthesis and Integration

Social Issues Fact Sheet: 7

The “Laws” of Effective Public Education About Fire Hazards



Pacific Northwest
Research Station



North Central
Research Station

*Synthesizing
Scientific Information
for Fire and Fuels
Project Managers*

The information for this fact sheet was provided by Dr. Dennis Mileti and staff at the Natural Hazards Center in Boulder, Colorado.

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Fuels planning: Science synthesis and integration, an interagency research/management partnership to support the Ten-Year Fire Plan, led by Russell T. Graham, RMRS, and Sarah M. McCaffrey, NCRS.

In communicating with people about wildland fire hazards and fuel treatments, there are many factors to consider. Within the past 10 years, breakthrough research has identified the factors that are most important for effectively communicating about hazards. This is one of several fact sheets that will address wildland fire hazard communication.

The “Laws” of Effective Communication About Hazards

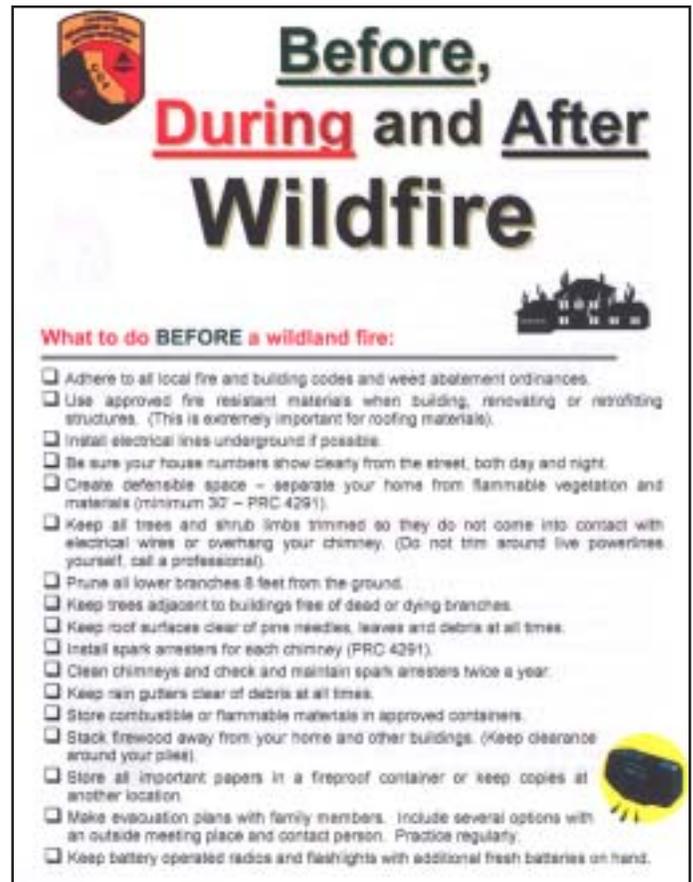
The following seven “Laws” of effective public communication should be considered in any state-of-the-art education campaign:

1. **Be Clear.** Complicated phenomena must be clearly explained in nontechnical terms. Wildland fire and fuels experts generally need help in communicating in nontechnical terms, so hire people who have the skills to work with the experts to craft a message that will be clear to the public.
2. **Use Varied Sources.** Information must come from various relevant sources including technical experts and scientists, and from people familiar to locals.
3. **Render Information Consistently and Repeat Often.** The information you provide should be consistent and repeated frequently using a variety of media. You need to be sure that if the message has changed from what was offered in the past, that these changes are explained.



Neighbors, friends, and relatives can help spread the message about wildland fire and fuels management (photo credit: V. Sturtevant).

4. **Use a Stream of Communications.** Messages on TV and radio are effective, but what works best is an information stream using lots of different media. Over time, that stream should include a written document mailed directly to people's homes.
5. **Tell People What to Do.** The most important information that you can give people is to tell them what they can do before, during, and after an event. Don't assume they already know.
6. **Support People in Their Search for More Information.** If your education effort is working, people will be discussing the topic with family, neighbors, coworkers, and others in the community. They will often search out more information on their own to validate and confirm what they've heard. Place additional, accurate information in readily accessible locations throughout the community. People may also come back to you with questions. Expect them to seek additional information. Encourage and support it.
7. **Use Clear Words and Great Graphics.** Clear information works best, so use simple language and support the language with attractive graphics.



This checklist, prepared by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, tells people exactly what to do before, during, and after a wildland fire (the 2-page checklist can be found at: http://www.fire.ca.gov/php/education_content/downloads/beforeduringandafter.pdf).

Social Science Team Fact Sheets

Look for fact sheet topics from the Social Science Team including information on developing personal responsibility for fuels reduction, communicating fire hazard, topics for community fire plans, guidelines for community education, and the “golden rule” for communicating fire hazard to people.

Fuels Planning: Synthesis and Integration

This fact sheet is one in a series being produced as part of a larger project supported by the USDA Forest Service to synthesize new knowledge and information relevant to fire and fuels management. Fact sheets address topics related to stand structure, environmental impacts, economics, and human responses to these factors. Information in the fact sheets is targeted for the dry forests of the Inland West, but is often applicable across broad regions of the country. For more information, please visit our Web site at:

www.fs.fed.us/fire/tech_transfer/synthesis/synthesis_index

The Fuels Planning fact sheets are based on preliminary findings. Information from fact sheets will be synthesized in an upcoming publication.