



## National Wildfire Coordinating Group Communicator's Guide for Wildland Fire Management: *Fire Education, Prevention, and Mitigation Practices*

### 8. Fire Prevention

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#### **Fire Prevention**

This chapter includes specific concepts for communicating prevention messages. This chapter also includes information about the national Fire Prevention Education Teams. Overall **communication planning processes, tactics, and materials development** are included in other chapters.

Much of this section has been consolidated from the Fire Prevention Guides, some of which are being discontinued and replaced with this *Communicator's Guide*.

Consult the **APPENDIX** for this chapter for a number of related resources.

## Introduction

In recent years, the focus of fire prevention has changed. While the end goal of preventing catastrophic loss of life, property, and natural resources has remained the same, the strategies and tactics involved have been modified. Increasing fuel loads have made today's wildland fires harder to control, expensive to suppress, and a threat to the lives of firefighters and civilians. Potential negative wildland fire consequences now involve more than blackened acres and property loss. When today's wildland fires spread they often burn with intense heat and erratic fire behavior, severely impacting and even altering ecosystems and communities and challenging their ability to recover – and sometimes claiming human lives.

It is important to embrace the fact that, while past suppression tactics have been effective, fire prevention tactics and strategies have changed. No longer can we afford to invest all our resources in fire suppression forces, equipment, and strategies. “Reactive” fire suppression programs must evolve into “proactive” fire management programs that effectively apply fire prevention and hazardous fuels reduction techniques to not only reduce unwanted fire ignitions, but also minimize damages and personnel exposure from wildfires.

As communicators prepare to embark on a fire prevention program, it's critical to keep this in mind: wildland fire is an essential, natural process. **The goal of a fire prevention program is to prevent unwanted human caused fires.** While this requires raising awareness of the risks associated with wildland fire, the message must be balanced with the natural role of fire to support the overall mission of land management agencies – which sometimes includes using fire as a tool. If we go too far in “scaring” the public, they will not be inclined to support other fire management initiatives. A holistic approach to wildland fire communication is key.

New techniques and strategies for fire prevention education can be used in specific situations to more effectively reduce the damages and risks from unwanted wildfires. Producing an effective wildfire prevention plan may mean doing old things differently, doing new things, aiming at different targets or getting “out of the rut” and working outside the comfort zone for a while. It will be important to develop efficient prevention programs and deciding when they should be carried out. This may mean doing more adult education. It may mean doing more high visibility patrolling with fire suppression personnel. It may mean giving prevention training to non-fire personnel. It will mean better results for most prevention programs.

The information in this chapter will help to design and implement an effective, proactive program to reduce unwanted human caused fires and mitigate suppression costs and losses from unwanted wildland fires. There also are a number of resources in the [Appendix](#) for this chapter.

### The Three E's of the Fire Prevention Triangle

The overall strategy of every wildfire prevention plan should focus on the “three E's” of the fire prevention triangle: Engineering, Education and Enforcement. Each of these three activities is an important piece when reaching out to the public and ensuring that there is a strong understanding of the message that is being conveyed. Within each of the three categories there are several guiding principles to follow. While the general message is that all prevention programs need to use a variety of methods to capture the public interest and therefore understanding, it is important to understand how each of the three activities are crucial to wildfire prevention.

This *Communication Guide* will focus primarily on the **Education** side of the fire prevention triangle. For detailed information on the engineering and enforcement sides, consult the NWCG Prevention courses. A catalog of courses is available at [www.nwcg.gov/pms/pubs/pubs.htm](http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/pubs/pubs.htm).

## Fire Prevention Messages

Creating and maintaining key messages is important when developing a wildfire prevention plan. It will ensure that all members of the fire community are on the same page, and will provide a consistent message for the public to follow.

Consider taking NWCG fire prevention courses, which explore prevention techniques. View the catalog online. [www.nwcg.gov/pms/pubs/pubs](http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/pubs/pubs)

Following is a list of considerations as you prepare key messages for your fire prevention education needs. More information regarding the development of key messages is included in *Chapter 4: Communications Planning and Tactics* of this guide.

- **Closures and Restrictions**
  - Strive for consistency among agencies and simplicity of message.
  - Strive for positive messaging. If appropriate, include information about lands that are open. In the case of prescribed burns, reference the positive benefits of the burn.
  - Promote meetings between adjoining agencies, civic government, and landowners.
  - Review delegation of authority where applicable.
  - Review any existing agreements, plans, or policies that already exist that give direction to restrictions and closure.
  - Review available resources to ensure they are adequate to meet your needs; this includes state and local government, plus any private or volunteer groups.
  - Identify local jurisdictional laws, regulations, codes, and ordinances.
  - Determine the collateral losses associated with closures and restricted use, such as damage to tourism based economy, loss of recreation values, etc.
- **Campfires**
  - Closures and restrictions.
  - Clear 10 feet around the campfire.
  - Dead out (cool to the touch).
- **Smoking**
  - Restrictions, such as only allowed in buildings or vehicles.
  - Use lighters instead of matches.
  - No smoking while traveling through wooded areas.
- **Fireworks**
  - Laws and regulations on types of fireworks that may be allowed.
  - Law and regulations that prohibit use of fireworks.
  - Closures and restrictions.
- **Trash/Ditch Burning/Debris Burning**
  - Closures and restrictions.
  - Extreme fire danger messages.
  - Alternatives to burning.
- **Vehicles**
  - Examples of possible origins, such as not allowing contact between the exhaust system and dry grass.
  - Information on how to prevent vehicle fires.

- **Arson**
  - Report suspicious activity to local law enforcement authorities. Engage neighbors with Community Watches.
  - Arson fires are a waste of people's tax dollars, such as added suppression costs and law enforcement authorities focused on fire instead of other crimes.
  - Avoid loss of property and lives due to intentional fires.
  
- **Weather**
  - Be aware of how the weather relates to fire danger; include in evening weather forecast.
  - Conduct tours/show-me trips for meteorologists, especially if you have a prescribed or wildland fire. This really helps them get familiar with the relationship of fire and weather.
  - Have meteorologists tie in with safety messages around holidays (fireworks, jack-o-lanterns, bon fires, burning of the greens, advent wreaths, candles, and greenery, etc.)
  
- **Wildland/Urban Interface – See Chapter 9: Fire Mitigation for more information and messages on this topic.**

## Wildfire Prevention Education

Wildfires have the potential to cause extensive loss of life, property, and resources. As fire conditions approach or worsen, fire prevention, and education is often overlooked, fire prevention education teams can be mobilized in advance of fire starts, when fire danger conditions worsen.

The purpose of this section is to provide wildland fire managers with a variety of possible strategies or treatments in designing an effective wildland fire prevention program.

This section lists fire prevention activities that have proven to be successful in reducing ignitions and losses from wildland fires, when applied effectively and in the appropriate situations. Keep in mind that this list is not all inclusive and that prevention activities not on this list may also prove to be effective.

### Internal Communications

Internal newsletters, information board posting, staff meetings, dispatch morning reports, on-site training programs, and tailgate sessions all provide excellent opportunities to communicate fire prevention messages. Fire prevention information can also be presented at on-site workshops, seminars, and other educational programs.

### The Public Information Officer and Wildfire Prevention

The primary responsibility of a Public Information Officer assigned to a wildfire is to keep the public and other incident personnel updated about suppression efforts. However, having the attention of the public and the news media focused on a wildfire presents a unique opportunity to deliver fire prevention messages as well. Public Information Officers are encouraged to deliver fire prevention messages when they are talking to the public and the news media about wildfire suppression. Sometimes, in the heat of the moment, it is easy to lose sight of this opportunity. Always contact the Incident Public Information Officer(s) assigned to a wildfire in your area and work with them to deliver unified messages to your shared audiences.

For example:

- The 5,000-acre Elkin Fire, burned out of control 10 miles east of Reno, was started by a carelessly discarded cigarette. People who use or visit forest lands this time of year should smoke only in cleared areas or in vehicles and dispose of cigarette butts properly.
- The Sandpiper Fire has slowed significantly along its western flank near Bear Haven. In part because much of the old, dense chaparral in that area was eliminated last spring during a BLM prescribed burn.
- The Warm Lake Fire is currently threatening hundreds of cabins in the area. To help protect their structures from wildfire, homeowners should store firewood away from their houses and clear the brush away or from around their structures.

**National Fire Prevention Education Teams** are available to support any geographic area preceding and during periods of high fire danger or fire activity. The requesting unit may use severity dollars in support of a Fire Prevention Education Team. A brief introduction is included in this chapter. Additional information can be found online through the [NWCG Wildland Fire Education Working Team](#) page.

**Smokey Bear** is among the most successful public awareness and education campaigns. Smokey gives a recognizable face to the prevention cause, and is a priceless tool for wildland fire agencies. His image must be used properly to protect its integrity. Check with your fire prevention coordinator for the proper use of Smokey Bear.

## **Public Awareness and Education**

Education of the public on the natural role of fire and the prevention of unwanted wildland fires is becoming increasingly important as communities encroach on wildland areas. Nationally, arson and debris burning are the leading causes of wildfires in the wildland/urban interface. Education and enforcement is key to prevention of these types of fires. It is also key to a better public understanding of the benefits of prescribed and natural fire. Printed materials, including general information handouts, site bulletins, and brochures, should include a fire prevention message. The use of the Smokey Bear icon should be encouraged in order to emphasize the prevention message. Smokey draws immediate attention and enhances any fire prevention message. Media campaigns can be initiated which include show-me tours, photo opportunities, and demonstrations, and solicit support for public assistance in fire prevention programs. Appropriately located signs and posters with carefully worded prevention messages are effective.

Wildfire prevention education includes those activities that are aimed at changing people's behavior by increasing their awareness and understanding of the issues. Following are sample tactics for consideration when developing a prevention education plan.

- **Community Awareness**

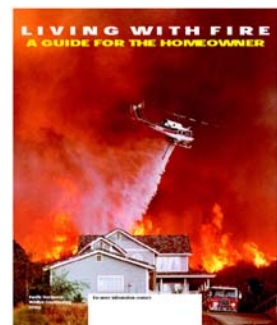
- Provide fire safety videos, CDs, and DVDs to other agencies and organizations.
- Provide homeowner fire safety material.
- Conduct fire safety programs with homeowner's associations.
- Conduct or participate in local town meetings.
- Conduct fire prevention education programs with local service clubs.
- Provide information with local county planning commissions.
- Provide public education training for local fire departments.
- Coordinate community activities, such as "Fire Awareness Time" annual campaign (spring clean-up, weed abatement program).
- Develop guidelines for field use for working with local organizations, governments, and communities.
- Help to implement programs such as [Neighborhood Watch](#), [Junior Forest Ranger](#), and [Firewise](#) programs.
- Public Meetings – Participate with city councils and county commissioners to proclaim "Fire Prevention Week."
- Develop a system to incorporate **roadside signing** in selected areas, such as those with a high occurrence of human caused fires.
- Develop a fire prevention page on the Internet.



- **Mass Media - Television**

- Prepare seasonal public service announcements and interviews for local use.
- Coordinate efforts with fire prevention cooperators to develop television public service announcements.
- Monitor and facilitate the national Advertising Council activities with local stations.
- During local fire incidents, stress the importance of increased fire prevention efforts.
- Participate in morning or afternoon local television talk shows.
- Continue presenting rotating fire prevention messages on cable television.
- Work with meteorologists to provide fire danger and prevention messages in their forecast

- **Mass Media - Print/Radio**
  - Provide local radio public service announcements to appropriate stations.
  - Provide local written media with timely news releases.
  - Develop a schedule of local fire prevention activities and prepare news releases to be used on a scheduled basis.
  - Provide local print media with timely news releases.
  - Assist local print media to obtain Advertising Council materials.
  
- **Signing**
  - Develop and implement a **fire prevention sign plan**, and be sure to update annually. The plan should describe:
    - Sign locations (highway, roadside, etc.).
    - Sign standards (size, configuration).
    - Types of messages (seasonally).
    - Maintenance responsibility.
    - Procurement procedures.
  - Install fire prevention signing at points of significant interest.
  - Implement a highway rest stop fire prevention signing program.
  - Implement a highway rest area or visitor information center fire prevention display program.
  - Repair and maintain existing signs.
  - Design and produce cause specific signing.
  
- **Fire Prevention High Visibility Public Contact**
  - Establish engine patrol routes and implement on a needed basis, i.e., holidays, high use periods and weekends.
  - Develop a hunter assistance patrol program which includes fire prevention messages.
  - Implement high visibility fire prevention efforts in the following areas:
    - Fire prevention patrol.
    - Visitor center fire prevention.
    - Organizational militia approach to fire prevention.
    - Establish “trap lines” including contacts with key community leaders and forest users at key locations
  
- **Agency Printed Material**
  - Evaluate all printed material (brochures, flyers, etc.) to determine if adequate fire prevention considerations are being displayed.
  - Incorporate fire prevention messages into existing agency publications. Coordinate with the appropriate program staff to find out what brochures and maps are being developed or revised for future publication.
    - Recreation maps and brochures could include a reminder to make sure campfires are dead out before leaving.
    - Fish and wildlife brochures could include a message about the damage that human-caused wildfires do to habitat.
    - Forestry brochures could include information about how long it takes for forests to recover from human-caused wildfires.
  - Develop a newspaper insert about fire awareness, or leverage an existing newspaper insert. For example, **Living With Fire** is used in many states.
  - Review existing publications (evaluate, update, and re-publish) as needed.
  - Plan, and evaluate future publication needs and develop a timeline for completion.





- Follow publication standards and guidelines, and control procedures for future publications or revised publications.
  - Pre-school (3-5 years): Develop the fire prevention message in coloring and story books.
  - K-6 (5-12 years): Implement new and innovative printed material such as comic books, posters, stickers, etc. Consider using the same themes as electronic media.
  - 7-12 (12-17 years): Same as K-6 but expand into teen-type magazines, stickers, posters, etc.
  - Adult (18+ years): Focus on newspapers, magazines, posters, etc. Consider same themes as electronic media. In areas with various cultural backgrounds, consider the addition of bilingual materials.
- Use fire prevention messages and materials, such as:
  - Defensible space .
  - Demonstration areas using property of a key community leader.
  - Home fire protection guide.
  - Fire awareness guide for homeowners.
  - Fire risk rating for homeowners in the WUI.
  - “Living with Fire” newspaper insert.

#### **Education Standards**

Be sure all school related programs meet established standards for learning. See the **Youth and Education** section of Chapter 4 for resources.

- **Public Education – General**

- Develop an organized effort, and provide “co-op” coordination for fire education activities associated with fire prevention characters.
- Conduct prevention activities with local schools.
- Conduct outdoor fire safety programs, such as campfire safety.
- Facilitate the use of school fire safety curriculums in local schools.
- Develop wildfire information programs for high school and junior high school students, such as school trading cards.
- Continue the use of Smokey Bear as a prevention tool.
- Participate in interagency education programs, such as parades, fairs, and displays to maintain high visibility of the fire prevention effort.
- Actively participate in local Fire Prevention Week promotions.
- Conduct hunter safety sessions and stress fire prevention.
- Utilize local area celebrities to promote wildfire prevention efforts.
- Consider other fire prevention activities, such as:
  - A mall display during Fire Prevention Week.
  - Train campground hosts in fire prevention.
  - Provide group tours of a fire facility.
  - Increase public contact by recreation technicians.
  - Provide fire prevention information at public rooms.
  - Conventions of conservation groups.
  - Children's festival.
  - Hunter safety booth.
- Conduct outdoor Fire Safety programs, such as:
  - Campground talks.
  - Hunter stations.
  - Visitor centers.
  - Check stations.
  - Reception areas.
- Partner with Resource Conservation and Development councils.



## Wildland Fire Prevention Education Teams

Fire Prevention Education Teams are available to support any geographic area preceding and during periods of high fire danger or fire activity. A federal unit may use severity dollars in support of a national Fire Prevention Education Team. States and other agencies will have appropriate funding systems. Federal and state agencies should be encouraged to form local interagency fire prevention education teams. This can be an effective way to coordinate with neighboring agencies and other partners.

### Purpose

The purpose of prevention education teams is to assist a local unit in the prevention of human-caused wildfire. This involves working together to:

- Complete fire risk assessments.
- Determine the severity of the situation.
- Facilitate community awareness and education in fire prevention, which may include prescribed burning if requested by host agency.
- Coordinate announcement of interagency restrictions and closures.
- Coordinate fire prevention efforts with the public, special target groups, state and local agencies, and elected officials.
- Promote public and personal responsibility regarding fire prevention in the wildland/urban interface.
- Develop fire prevention plans.
- Develop a communications plan.

Consider mobilization of a team when an unusual event or circumstance warrants or is predicted.

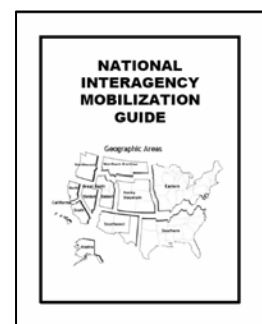
Examples are:

- Severe burning conditions.
- Unusually high fire occurrence.
- Majority of firefighting resources committed.
- Preparedness levels above normal.
- A large number of people will be coming into a local community for a special event.

Fire prevention education teams can help reduce loss of life, property, and resources. They also can reduce suppression costs and improve interagency relations.

### Organization and Ordering of Fire Prevention Education Teams

A team usually consists of a team leader, a public affairs or information officer, and a prevention specialist. Other team members such as a graphics specialist or a computer specialist may be added as needed. Interagency personnel can be mobilized through normal dispatch channels to assist in fire prevention education at any level of an organization. The individuals ordered for prevention education teams must have the skills required to fill the position for which they have been ordered. A team leader trainee is strongly encouraged to further expand the pool of qualified team leaders. Refer to the National Mobilization Guide, Chapter 20, 22.5.10, Cooperative Fire Prevention Education Teams, for ordering information. [www.nifc.gov/news/2001nmg.pdf](http://www.nifc.gov/news/2001nmg.pdf)



## Smokey Bear

When developing a fire prevention education plan, one of the best sources to reference and utilize for messaging is Smokey Bear. The guardian of our forest has been a part of the American scene for more than 60 years. Dressed in a ranger's hat, belted blue jeans and carrying a shovel, he has been the recognized wildfire prevention symbol since 1944. Today, Smokey Bear is one of the most highly recognized advertising symbols of all time and is protected by Federal law. He even has his own private zip code: 20052.

The revitalized Junior Forest Ranger Activity Book (for ages 7-12) features an activity that discusses Smokey Bear as well as an activity about “good” fire and “bad” fire. This resource can be found at [www.symbols.gov/jfr](http://www.symbols.gov/jfr).

Smokey's core message to the public continues to be that we all should help prevent accidental or unwanted wildfires. Today the fire message is more complex than ever. We must continue to effectively utilize fire prevention education – and Smokey's message is as relevant as ever. On the other hand, Smokey's message must be understood in context with other, more comprehensive messages that focus on the ecologically and socially acceptable role of fire in the ecosystem. Note that Smokey's message should not be *altered*, but rather it should be *explained in the broader context* when appropriate.

More information can be found online at [www.smokeybear.com](http://www.smokeybear.com).

### The Cooperative Forest Fire Program (CFFP)

CFFP is a joint effort of the Advertising Council, the National Association of State Foresters and the USDA Forest Service. The objective of the CFFP is to create and maintain a public awareness about wildfire prevention. The CFFP manages Smokey Bear and related programs.

The CFFP provides a framework, which can be expanded upon by regional, state, and local efforts. State and local programs will identify specific problem areas and planned solutions. Using Smokey Bear as the vehicle for wildfire prevention messages, using a variety of techniques, can stimulate active support and cooperation with other public agencies, educators, businesses, industry, and people interested in working to prevent unwanted human-caused wildfires.

The official Forest Service program policy and guidelines can be found in FSM Chapter 3110, Cooperative Forest Fire Prevention (CFFP) [www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/fsm/3100/3110.txt](http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/fsm/3100/3110.txt), and FSH 5109.18, Chapter 20, Cooperative Forest Fire Prevention Program (CFFP). [www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/fsh/5109.18/5109.18\\_20.txt](http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/fsh/5109.18/5109.18_20.txt)

### Program Components

There are five major components to the CFFP Program:

1. **Public Service Advertising** using the media, through educational and community involvement activities, corporate sponsorships, special prevention promotions and with collateral materials.
2. **Campaign and Educational Activities** including classroom programs, national cache materials, and the Junior Forest Ranger program.
3. **Commercial Licensing** of Smokey Bear's likeness for use in materials for sale.
4. **Image and Appearance** including standards and quality control for trademark protection, presentation, artwork and costume use .
5. **Awards and Recognition** such as the bronze, silver, and gold Smokey Bear awards are given at state, regional, and national levels for excellence in Fire Prevention.