

Fuels Planning: Science Synthesis and Integration

Fact Sheet # 26

The "Laws" of Effective Public Education About Fire Hazards

Synthesizing Social Science Information for Fire and Fuels Project Managers

Social Science Team
Co-Leads:

Pam Jakes
Sue Barro

USDA Forest Service
North Central Research Station
1992 Folwell Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108

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



August 2004

In working to communicate with people about wildland fire hazards and fuel treatments, there are many factors to consider. Within the last 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

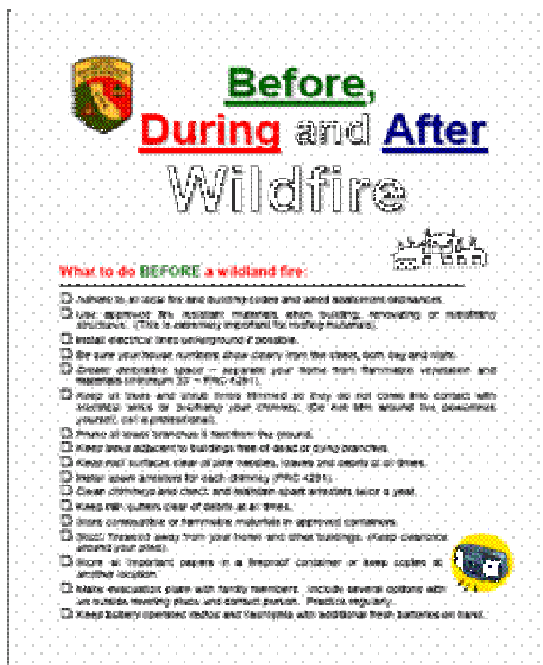
The following 7 "Laws" of effective public communication should be considered in any state-of-the-art education campaign:

1. **Be Clear.** Complicated phenomena must be clearly explained in non-technical terms. Wildland fire and fuels experts generally need help in communicating in non-technical 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.



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

3. **Render Information Consistent 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.
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 kinds of 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.



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.

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.

The Communicating About Hazards fact sheet series:

- Fact Sheet #24: *Important Considerations for Communicating About Hazards*
- Fact Sheet #25: *Three Critical Topics to Cover When Talking About Hazards*
- Fact Sheet #26: *The "Laws" of Effective Public Education About Fire Hazards*
- Fact Sheet #27: *The "Golden Rule" and Other Lessons on Communicating About Hazards*

Fuels Planning: Synthesis & 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 website at:

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

Although all of the Fuels Planning fact sheets have been reviewed by scientists, they are not official Forest Service publications and some of the work is based on preliminary findings. Information from fact sheets will be synthesized in an upcoming publication.