



Hot off the Presses: FUSEE in the News

FUSEE had another banner year in the news media in 2008! FUSEE members were quoted in more than 41 newspaper, radio and television news stories in national, regional, and local media outlets.

One of our biggest successes was appearing in the *New York Times* and the CBS National News in back-to-back stories about the controversial use of toxic fire retardant chemicals. Significantly, these stories appeared during dramatic wildfire incidents burning in southern California. This shows that we are making real progress in getting journalists to go beyond wildfire "war reporting," and instead, provide critical coverage of controversial fire policy issues even during the heat of "battle."



Another huge success was the publication of a series of feature-length investigative stories in the *Los Angeles Times* last summer. FUSEE members provided extensive background interviews, documents, and contact information to help LAT reporters develop their superb articles. Stories included: causes of rising suppression costs; the connection between urban sprawl, invasive weeds, and climate change; the Australian model of 'leave early or stay and defend' for homeowners threatened by wildfire; and 'political shows' of aerial retardant drops. In the last article FUSEE had the distinction of being used for a dramatic 'pull-quote' at the top of the full-page article. The whole LAT series was right out of the wish list for stories listed in our manual for journalists, "A Reporter's Guide to Wildland Fire."

Another tangible outcome of our work in the news media was getting the California Regional Forester to reverse his decision to "ban" prescribed burning and wildland fire use in 2008. After a tragic helicopter crash killed nine firefighters fighting a wilderness wildfire, FUSEE raised the issue of safety risks to firefighters from aggressive suppression, and questioned the rationale of the Forest Service's "attack all fires" policy in wilderness areas that should be ideal places for wildland fire use.

While the U.S. Forest Service put a "gag" order on its employees that prevented them from speaking to the press about the incident, FUSEE provided more than a dozen media interviews. We did not question specific operational decisions in that tragedy fire, but challenged the agency's arbitrary policy decision that eliminated the option of wildland fire use, a safer, less costly, less damaging means of managing fire. Our principled stand gained us public support, and public reaction forced the Forest Service to reverse its arbitrary policy decision.

In addition to stories about the environmental impacts of wildfire suppression and wildland fire use policy, FUSEE members appeared in excellent stories about Appropriate Management Response policy, fire suppression costs, the use of private contract firefighters and the emerging "Fire Industrial Complex," the connections between climate change and "megafires," the ecological benefits of wildland fire use and prescribe burning, natural post-fire recovery processes (especially in Yellowstone National Park), and chaparral fire ecology.

FUSEE also organized two national news teleconferences. In January, we held a news conference on the

topic of "Wildfire and Climate Change," and were joined by Dr. Tony Westerling, Dr. Tom Swetnam, and Dr. Michael Medler, president of the Association for Fire Ecology. In September, we held a news conference that was covered by CNN on the topic of "Appropriate Management Response Policy" featuring Dr. Penny Morgan from the University of Idaho, Dr. Bill Romme from Colorado State University, and Dr. Michael Medler from AFE. Overall, we were very successful in reaching our educational goals in working with the media.

Some of the highlights of our media work in 2008 include quotes published in the following articles:

- "Yellowstone Fires 20 Years Later: Park Blazes Changed Attitudes," *Billings Gazette* (July 5)
- "Private Firefighters' Role Growing in State," *San Francisco Chronicle* (July 27)
- "Air Tanker Drops in Wildfires Are Often Just For Show," *Los Angeles Time* (July 29)
- "'Let It Burn' Policy Banned for Fire Season," *Sacramento Bee* (August 9)
- "Forest Service Allows Controlled Burns in State Again," *Sacramento Bee* (August 22)
- "As Wildfires Spread, So Does the Red Ink," *Christian Science Monitor* (August 27)
- "In Fighting Wildfires, Concerns About Chemicals," *New York Times* (November 15)
- "Is Fire Retardant Harmful?" CBS News (national broadcast) (November 16)

FUSEE will continue serving our public education mission through working with journalists to help produce high-quality news stories that educate citizens and policymakers about the broad range of fire ecology and management issues. Look for FUSEE in the news this wildfire season!

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Your [membership](#) dues and financial [donations](#) support FUSEE's public education and policy advocacy work to improve the environmental and working conditions of fire management workers and the citizens they serve.

FUSEE supports a growing network of progressive fire professionals who envision a new fire management paradigm that interconnects firefighter safety with professional ethics and ecological restoration.



We strive to provide a safe forum and a collective voice for public and private sector fire management professionals to educate the public, policymakers, and the press about the challenges facing fire management today.

If you would like more information about FUSEE, don't hesitate to [contact us](#) or visit our [website](#). We look forward to hearing from you.

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