



Community Protection

Ideas Submitted to the WRSC from METI

During outreach to western stakeholders regarding the Cohesive Strategy, many comments focused on encouraging and assisting communities to accept the risks of and take responsibility for being prepared for wildfires. There are over 70,000 communities at risk from wildfire across the United States. Every year, lives, communities, homes, and other values are threatened and many are lost. Community preparedness and action are critical to reducing and eliminating devastating losses.

One of the Cohesive Strategy national goals is to create fire-adapted communities within which human populations and infrastructure can withstand a wildland fire. This goes well beyond increasing fire protection capacity and the ability to respond to wildfire events. It means taking a proactive approach to assessing wildfire risk to communities, sharing responsibility for mitigating threats and consequences, and taking shared action well ahead of any wildfire occurrence. Being prepared means:

Understanding wildfire threats surrounding a community

- Conduct a thorough risk assessment within the community and surrounding areas. At a minimum, a risk assessment should include an assessment of fuels, weather, topography, and location of values to be protected. Defining high risk areas is an important step in this process.
- Identify the wildland -urban interface (WUI) and intermix. The main reason for identification of the WUI is to focus resources toward the protection of lives, property, and infrastructure. The WUI is not designated to infringe on personal property rights, raise taxes, or raise insurance rates.

Conducting collaborative community planning and identifying focus areas within a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) or its equivalent

- Include as many stakeholders as possible in planning efforts, not just fire protection agencies. Everyone has a stake in making their community safe from wildfire.
- Conduct open houses and public meetings to gather ideas from community members. Rely on other CWPP efforts for good ideas on what to include in the planning effort. Utilize subject matter experts in wildfire planning to assist and provide valuable input and build on existing successful examples – don’t reinvent the wheel.

Implementing community actions to mitigate threats and reduce risks to acceptable levels

- Apply for federal and state grants that can assist communities and landowners financially with accomplishing fuel treatment/mitigation projects.
- Many fuel mitigation projects can also be done with volunteer labor when communities realize how importance this kind of work is to building a commitment to shared responsibility for community protection.



- Don't just focus mitigation work on fuels; put effort into understanding and assessing the ignitability of structures by conducting wildfire structure evaluations. Fire departments and other wildland fire protection agencies can assist in conducting these evaluations.

Engaging landowners and homeowners through public education efforts to increase understanding of wildfire risks and individual roles and responsibilities in dealing with those risks

- Seek incentives to landowners for accomplishing fire mitigation projects on their properties such as tax credits/rebates, insurance rate reductions, free disposal of slash, and grant or cost-share programs.
- Encourage the development of Fire Safe Councils and cultivate champions for making and sustaining fire-adapted communities, neighborhoods, and subdivisions .

Each community has to define its own acceptable level of risk and protection based on the fire environment in which they live. Every community should strive to meet the goal of withstanding a wildfire that threatens life, property, infrastructure, and other values. Fire protection agencies may not be able to protect every person, house, structure, and value when a wildfire occurs; response capacity can be overwhelmed by a catastrophic wildfire threatening a community. So, when there aren't the resources available to provide protection, it becomes critical that proper pre-planning and actions have been taken prior to the wildfire to reduce risk. Pre-planning and mitigation actions accomplished in advance allow fire protection agencies to concentrate limited capability and efforts where the need is greatest and risks have not been reduced.

More and more people in the West are moving into areas that are considered at risk from wildfire. Those who live in these areas need to understand that fire will never be eliminated from the environment. Fire was, is, and always will be a part of the western landscape and ecology. That's why it is important for communities and landowners to learn to live with fire and be well prepared to deal with it before it even starts.

There are numerous organizations and websites that are ready and available to provide the needed assistance or information to help communities with planning efforts. Use these resources to get started:

- **FireWise communities** have many publications and information on training, guidelines, and how to get in touch with others who are in the process of developing or have completed a community plan. <http://www.firewise.org>
- **The Fire Safe Council** website has links to all of the national public and private organizations who are members of the Council, how to find local councils and education tools, how to run a council, and more information for homeowners. <http://www.firesafecouncil.org>