

# PACIFIC SOUTHWEST Forest and Range Experiment Station

FOREST SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
P.O. BOX 245, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94701

## FIRE PREVENTION FILM SPOTS . . .

### reception by television public service directors

Gene C. Bernardi

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An effective television spot announcement of fire prevention would modify the careless fire behavior of wildland visitors. To be effective, however, such an announcement must reach its audience: it must be made available to the television stations and must be shown frequently and at times when this audience is watching.

As part of its ongoing fire prevention program, the California Division of Forestry provides public service spots to television stations throughout the State. Because the amount of free air time is limited, fire prevention messages must compete with other TV spots that cover a wide range of public interests.

How a station's public service director rates a spot may determine whether it is shown, and when and how often it is shown. The rating may be affected by the presentation of the spot to the station as well as by its subject matter and quality. (Under CDF policy, a fire prevention officer personally delivers the film spot to the station.) It is possible that a director might rate a spot positively and yet not show it, and the converse might also be true.

To guide its efforts to increase the number of showings of its fire prevention messages, the CDF needed answers to questions such as these:

- Are public service directors selective in showing spot announcements, and what influences their choice?
- Of all fire prevention spots received, which do the directors remember, and how well do they remember the CDF spots?
- How do directors rate the CDF spots?
- What preference do directors have as to length of spots and availability of spots in other languages than English?

● Do the fire prevention officers reach the directors in delivering the spots, and what are the directors' impressions of the fire prevention officers?

Some answers were provided by a survey conducted by Haug Associates among public service

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Television public service directors in California were asked to rate fire prevention film spots they had received from the California Division of Forestry. Most directors recalled receiving the spot announcements and rated them high in technical quality and interest. Delivery of the films by a fire prevention officer impressed directors favorably. Fire prevention announcements generally ranked low in likelihood of selection for showing, however. Showing might be increased by giving the announcements a local flavor; tying them in with public health, conservation, and the environment; and giving greater attention to personal delivery of the films by fire prevention officers at an appointed time.

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directors of TV stations who were provided CDF fire prevention film spots in 1973. Most directors recalled receiving the two film spots. They rated them positively in technical quality, ability to communicate, and interest to the audience. But only one-fourth of the directors recalled seeing the fire prevention officer who delivered the TV spots. And the likelihood that a fire prevention spot would actually be used was ranked relatively low.

Results of this study suggest that the fire prevention officer should exert special efforts to deliver the film spots personally and to do so at an appointed time. Ways of enhancing the chances that a spot will be shown might be to give it a local flavor, tie it in with public health, or orient it toward conservation and the environment.

#### METHODS

The California Division of Forestry provided a list of television stations scheduled to receive the 1973 CDF film spots. (The list was complete except for inadvertent omissions in one district.) One week before the start of interviewing, a letter was sent to the public service director at each station explaining the study and requesting cooperation in a follow-up telephone interview.

Most stations received the CDF spots in July and August 1973, but a few did not get them until early October. Interviews were conducted from October 15 to 19, when the fire season was just about ending. Telephone interviews were completed for 72 percent of the listed television stations, or 53 out of a possible 74. The number of stations interviewed by CDF district was:

District:	Stations	
	Number	Percent
I	4	57
II	5	83
IV	15	72
V	13	81
VI	16	67
Total	53	72

#### RESULTS

Most television stations receive a large number of public service announcements. About 25 percent of the stations studied reported receiving more than 500 different public service spots; an additional 25 percent received more than 100, but less than 500. The remaining stations received 100 or less, or had not made a count.

The announcements received dealt with a wide range of subjects. Four out of 10 public service direc-

tors reported they received in a year's time spots covering more than 50 subjects.

#### ● Selectivity in showing of public service spots

Three-quarters of the public service directors reported that they do not air all spots equally—they show only a portion of those received and they show some more often than others. For those stations which select only some spots to show, the choice is determined mainly by (a) the spot's appeal to local interest; (b) its length and the time available; and (c) its quality and presentation.

Of the public service directors who show each spot at least once, slightly more than half reported they show some spots more than others. They discriminated between spots by applying criteria similar to those just mentioned—appeal to local interest, appeal to general interest (not small groups), quality, and length.

#### ● Subject matter preference in public service spots

Only 17 percent of the public service directors mentioned "fire prevention/fire safety" (no distinction was made between urban and wildland fires) as a subject they are particularly interested in covering with public service announcements. Only religion, education, and "other items" ranked lower than fire prevention/fire safety in likelihood of being shown. Ranking highest were "local interest" items:

Subjects mentioned:	Frequency of mention
	Percent
Local interest	71
Health	60
Charities	38
Military	25
Environment/conservation	25
Highway safety	23
Fire prevention/fire safety	17
General social issues/crime/taxes	17
Education	13
Religion	4
Other	10

These responses suggest that one way to increase a fire prevention spot's chances of being aired is to give it a local flavor, tie it in with public health, or orient the message toward the environment and conservation.

Four out of five public service directors specified the subjects of public service spots they are least likely to use. Only three persons mentioned forestry/fire spots as least likely to be shown. Each person gave a different reason: (a) "Don't get many,"

(b) "Tied in with insurance," and (c) "Had audiovisual defects."

Public service announcements most often mentioned as least likely to be shown are those having a company tagline or providing some type of free advertising for the sponsor. Stations also shy away from subjects that may interest only some of their viewers, or may possibly be offensive to others, such as political issues, military recruitment, appeals for money, liberal issues, and matters not pertinent to the local area.

The reasons given as to why stations are least likely to show spots dealing with these subjects are:

	<u>Frequency of response</u>
	<i>Percent</i>
Reason (multiple answers allowed):	
Involves free advertising/ monetary gain/commercial tagline/ fund raising	27
Promotes special-interest groups	19
Shows only one side of an issue	18
National, not local interest	11
Poor taste (unspecified)	6
Not suitable for children	4
Not pertinent for adults	2
Not many on the subject received	2
Audiovisual defects	2

● **Recollection by directors of fire prevention spots, and CDF spots in particular**

Television stations receive fire prevention announcements from a number of sources other than CDF, including the Advertising Council for the Smokey Bear campaign, local sources such as timber industries, and organizations concerned with urban fire safety. Nearly all (91 percent) of the television stations recalled receiving public service spots about fire prevention during the year. Half of these stations reported receiving seven or more spots about fire prevention.

The percentages were:

	<u>Frequency of response</u>
	<i>Percent</i>
Number remembered:	
1-2	13
3-4	15
5-6	17
7-8	8
9-10	10
11+	31

Unaided recall of the CDF spots was determined by asking the public service directors to describe all the spots they received about fire prevention during the year (the interviewer did not mention CDF). If

the respondent described a CDF spot, he was counted as recalling the spot *unaided*. Respondents who did not describe one or both of the two CDF spots unaided were read a description of "Air Attack" or "Environment" or both:

"Air Attack" featured Governor Reagan telling about a new method of fighting fire by dropping fire retardant from aircraft. It also showed the things that children and adults should not do if we are to prevent forest fires.

"Environment" featured Governor Reagan telling about pollution, mudslides, and other damage to our environment by wildland fires.

Respondents were also told that these spots were distributed by the CDF and were asked if they recalled receiving them. Those who said they remembered one or both of these spots were counted as having *aided* recall.

Combined recall (aided and unaided) of the CDF spots was not as high as might be expected, considering that they supposedly had been delivered to all the stations reached for interviews. A slightly greater proportion recalled "Air Attack" (58 percent) than recalled "Environment" (41 percent).

As is usual in such surveys, more respondents had to be prompted to recall the announcements than could describe them without a cue. The unaided recall for each was nearly the same ("Air Attack" 13 percent, "Environment" 15 percent), but the aided recall of "Air Attack" (45 percent) exceeded that of "Environment" (26 percent).

The respondents who described "Air Attack" on an unaided basis tended more to recall the action depicted ("dumping fire retardant on fire" or "fighting fire from an airplane") than to recall the fact that the Governor of California narrated the announcement or to recall the slogans used ("fires are man-made" or "at home and away, be fire safe today"). The most frequently recalled specifics of "Environment" were that it featured the Governor and scenes of a burned-out forest. "Environment" showed less action than did "Air Attack." More than two-thirds of those recalling either film on an unaided basis identified each as being distributed by the California Division of Forestry.

● **Attitudes toward CDF fire prevention film spots**

The public service directors were quite positive toward the CDF announcements, with 76 percent of those who recalled them mentioning something they liked. The film spots were praised most frequently

(24 percent) for being easy to understand and next most frequently (15 percent) for having the Governor of the State appearing in them. The following four reasons for liking the CDF spots received equal mention: California flavor/local appeal; graphics/quality; informative; actual action/eye catching.

Ten of the 33 public service directors who recalled the CDF spots mentioned something they disliked about them. The most frequently mentioned "dislike"—by 9 percent (three stations)—was that the spots are "unprofessional/have poor production/editing." Two stations said they did not like videotape. (The CDF spots were not on videotape.) Five other stations mentioned dislikes, each a different one: no visual action; not enough new spots; too dramatic; dislike slogan "At home and away, be fire safe today"; aimed at child audiences.

The CDF spots were rated well on three out of four ratings. Public service directors, using a five-point rating scale (excellent, good, fair, not too good, poor) assigned very positive ratings to the spots for their ability to communicate, their interest to the audience, and their technical quality. But they rated the spots considerably lower on their creativity:

Characteristic rated	Frequency of response	
	Number	Percent
Characteristic rated "excellent" or "good":		
Technical quality of film	23	70
Ability to communicate to audience	22	66
Interest to audience	21	63
Creativity	14	42

The public service directors were asked whether they throw CDF spots away each year or keep them longer than a year. The responses were: (a) throw them away each year, 51 percent; (b) keep them more than 1 year, 41 percent; (c) never received any, 6 percent; and (d) don't know, 2 percent. Three-quarters of those stations which retain the spots longer than 1 year said they do in fact show those from previous years.

#### • Preferences as to length of film spots and language

The 30-second and 60-second film spots are strongly preferred over the 20-second spot. More than half of the directors mentioned a preference for both

60-second and 30-second spots; while only 6 percent preferred 20-second spots. The 30-second spot was most popular; almost three-quarters of the directors preferred this length.

Half of the public service directors responded that they would be interested in receiving fire prevention spots in another language. All of these stations wanted them in Spanish, and a few wanted them in other languages as well.

#### • Delivery and reception of CDF film spots

All CDF spots were to have been delivered personally by a fire prevention officer to each television station, yet only one-fourth of the respondents said they received the films personally from an officer.

An additional 8 percent mentioned that the officer had given the films to someone else in the station. Some did not know how the films arrived and one out of 10 stations reported they had never received any. These data suggest that the fire prevention officers may have personally visited fewer than half the stations. At the other stations, directors said they received the spots through the mail.

The 13 public service directors who personally received the spots from a fire prevention officer were asked: "What, if anything, impressed you about the fire prevention officer who delivered the spots to you?" Nearly all respondents made positive comments about these individuals. The officers were praised primarily for being well informed or for coming in person.

The public service directors were asked to rate the fire prevention officers in terms of being understanding of the station's needs and on being professional. They assigned very positive ratings on both points—92 percent said the officers were very or somewhat understanding and professional.

Five of the respondents who personally met with the officer were able to recall his or her name. These five officers represented four different districts.

A final question was asked of the public service directors: "Is there anything that the fire prevention officer could do that would cause you to show the CDF announcements more frequently?" Only four directors made suggestions; all of these concerned the distribution and content of the films and did not reflect on the fire prevention officers.

#### The Author

GENE C. BERNARDI, a research sociologist with the Station at Berkeley, conducts studies in the prevention of man-caused forest fires. She holds a bachelor's degree (1951) in psychology and a master's degree (1964) in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley. She joined the Station staff in 1968 after working for the City of Oakland as a research associate (1964-1967).