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Fuels Planning: Science Synthesis and Integration

Social Issues Fact Sheet: 1

Developing Personal Responsibility for Fuels Reduction: Building a Successful Program to Engage Property Owners



Pacific Northwest
Research Station



North Central
Research Station

Synthesizing Scientific Information for Fire and Fuels Project Managers

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Fuels planning: Science synthesis and integration, an interagency research/management partnership to support the Ten-Year Fire Plan, led by Russell T. Graham, RMRS, and Sarah M. McCaffrey, NCRS.

In the course of your work as a land manager, you will no doubt be involved in developing programs to achieve various objectives, including the improvement of fuels management on private lands. There has been extensive research on how to develop effective programs, and this series of fact sheets synthesizes that information. Even if you aren't planning a formal program but you are working toward another objective, you may find the information presented here useful.

This series of fact sheets looks at ways to help motivate individuals to manage fuels on their property. In this first Social Issues fact sheet, we describe the steps you can follow that will help you plan and conduct a successful program. Although our focus here is on programs to engage property owners in fuels reduction, this information is applicable to similar land management programs. The prescriptions below are listed sequentially, but you may find that one step is achieved along with another, or that it's easier to develop a program by shuffling the order a bit. This is not a problem as long you accomplish the intent of each step.

Program Development Steps

1. Articulate the goal and objectives of the fuel reduction program.

Know what conditions you wish to achieve and be specific. If possible, engage property owners and community leaders in a process of defining specific targets and objectives of the fuels program. One useful model is for experts to offer a list of suggested treatment strategies and then allow community members to identify the options they can live with.

2. Analyze your audience.

Identify the people you wish to reach—this is your audience. Understand the fears and concerns, values, and abilities of your audience. Don't assume that you understand your audience because you work there. Interface communities, in particular, are in a state of flux, and new voices may be singing a different tune. Learn what information is personally relevant and useful to your audience. This information will be critical to developing specific strategies for your program.

3. Analyze your resources.

Identify the skills, dollars, and time you have for the program. Think about building partnerships with other agencies and organizations to share the costs of programs and reap the benefits from a more diverse crop of skills. If necessary, reconsider the goals and objectives of your program and set more realistic expectations.

4. Develop program strategies and tools that will engage your audience.

Develop a communication strategy using different types of information to engage different types of learners. Choose the tools and venues that work best to deliver your message to your audience—consider demonstration areas, festivals, interpretive signs, internet sites, posters, and bookmarks in addition to the more commonly used brochures, fact sheets, caps, TV ads, radio public service announcements, and newspaper coverage. Use as many techniques as possible, and incorporate vivid information, cues, and prompts to increase the effectiveness of your tools. Remember, many people learn by doing, others respond best to the written word, still others enjoy learning in informal gatherings with neighbors. Consider gearing your program to neighborhoods, a scale that has proved effective for the implementation of fuels management programs in the past.

5. Field-test program ideas.

It's always tempting to get out there and start doing something without first evaluating your strategy or tools. However, you are more likely to have a successful program if you run everything by a group that represents your audience *before* implementing your program. Find out which pictures are most appealing for the brochure and whether or not your buzzwords or cues communicate the right message. Collect feedback and revise your strategy and tools before you go out to the larger community.



Residents of the Applegate Valley. To build support and establish credibility for fuels management efforts, involve property owners in defining project targets or objectives (photo credit: V. Sturtevant).

6. Build a strategy to monitor success.

In times of tight budgets and competing programs, it is especially important that you are able to describe the outcomes of your programs and measure success. Consider a number of ways to monitor success including attendance at community events, drive-by assessments of the neighborhood, number of complaints, and physical changes in the landscape. Feedback cards, mail-in request cards, and coupons allow you to track what information is most useful and where people are most easily finding the information.

Other fact sheets in this series will be available in the forthcoming months.

Social Science Team Fact Sheets

Look for fact sheet topics from the Social Science Team including information on developing personal responsibility for fuels reduction, communicating fire hazard, topics for community fire plans, guidelines for community education, and the “golden rule” for communicating fire hazard to people.

Fuels Planning: Synthesis and 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 Web site at: www.fs.fed.us/fire/tech_transfer/synthesis/synthesis_index

The Fuels Planning fact sheets are based on preliminary findings. Information from fact sheets will be synthesized in an upcoming publication.