



OREGON OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Communications Toolkit: Wildfires

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Introduction

The intent of the **Communication Toolkit: Wildfires** is to assist messaging during and after a wildfire in Oregon. This toolkit contains information on communications with the media, partners and the public. During an emergency or disaster, the need for timely and accurate information, regarding what happened and what is being done, skyrockets. This toolkit will help coordinate messages.

This toolkit contains templates and suggestions for communications with the public and media. **Areas highlighted in yellow are meant to be edited to your specific agency.**

Messages to the Public

Key Messages

- Prevent new fires - please be careful!
- Be aware of the status of wildfires in your area.
- Be aware of smoke and unhealthy air conditions.
- Clear flammable items away from your home.
- Heed the advice of emergency officials regarding evacuations.
- Have an emergency plan and kit.
- Opt into emergency notification systems.
- Donate cash (not supplies) only to official non-profits organizations.

Expanded Messages

Preparing for a wildfire

- Hear the beep where you sleep.
 - A closed door may slow the spread of smoke, heat and fire. Install smoke alarms in every sleeping room and outside each separate sleeping area. Install alarms on every level of the home. Smoke alarms should be interconnected. When one sounds, they all sound.
- Test smoke alarms at least once a month by following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Change the batteries in smoke alarms at least once per year.
- Know what alert systems are used in your area.
 - Fire Weather Watch: Dangerous fire weather conditions are possible over the next 12 to 72 hours.
 - Red Flag Warning: Severe fire weather conditions are occurring or imminent.
- Know the [Oregon evacuation levels](#) and heed the advice of emergency management officials.
 - Level 1: Be Ready. There is an incident in the area and residents should be aware of the danger. Monitor media outlets for information and gather items in case an evacuation is issued.
 - Level 2: Be Set. There is significant danger in the area and residents should leave voluntarily or be prepared to leave at a moment's notice. If conditions deteriorate rapidly, emergency services cannot guarantee they will be able to provide notification.
 - Level 3: Go. Danger is current or imminent and residents should evacuate immediately.
- Have an emergency kit with necessary supplies for up to two weeks.
- Have a family plan with meeting places and multiple communication plans.
 - Designate an out-of-state contact. Local phone lines may be bogged down but a long distance call may go through.
 - Text messages may go through easier than a phone call.
- Have a mobile emergency kit to take with you in case you need to evacuate.
- Store hazardous and flammable materials in a fire resistant area or cabinet.
- Keep gutters, eaves, porches and decks clear of leaves and other debris.
- Keep yard and plants watered to keep from drying out.
- Create a "Defensible Space" around your home.
 - Remove debris and/or flammable materials away (suggested 30 feet) from your home.
- Learn how to use a fire extinguisher.

- Check all fire extinguishers in the home regularly to verify they are not expired.
- Prevent development of wildfires.
 - It is always best to use an ashtray when smoking. If an ashtray is not available, grind out cigarettes, cigars or pipe tobacco in the dirt, not on stumps or logs.
 - Do not throw smoking materials into brush or leaves.
 - Do not smoke on trails.
 - Campfire safety
 - i. Build campfires only where allowed.
 - ii. Never build a campfire in hazardous or dry conditions.
 - iii. If digging a fire pit choose a site at least 15 feet from tent walls, shrubbery, trees and other potentially flammable objects and enclose the pit with rocks.
 - iv. Do not burn aerosol cans, pressurized containers, glass or aluminum cans. These can explode, shatter, create harmful fumes or dust or a combination of these.
 - v. Allow the fire to burn completely to ash if possible.
 - vi. Pour water on the embers until hissing stops or if no water is available, stir dirt or sand into the embers with a shovel.
 - Debris burning safety
 - i. Do not burn during dry or windy conditions.
 - ii. Check local regulations if a permit is required.
 - iii. Select a burn site away from powerlines, buildings, vehicles, equipment or other potentially flammable objects.

During a wildfire

- Monitor news (radio, TV etc.) for updates on progress and evacuation orders.
- Heed the advice of emergency officials regarding evacuations.
 - Be mindful of low visibility in smoky conditions.
 - Drive with headlights on.
- Be aware of [smoke levels](#).
 - When smoke levels are high, keep windows closed and use air circulation features on home and vehicle heating/cooling units.
 - Do not burn anything that decreases air quality.
 - Candles
 - Fireplaces
 - Gas stoves
 - Wildfire smoke can have negative health impacts.
 - Smoke irritates the eyes, throat and lungs.
 - Worsening respiratory symptoms can occur in people with underlying lung disease such as asthma and pulmonary inflammation.
 - Heart attacks or irregular heart rhythm can occur in people with underlying heart disease.
- The [Oregon Wildfire Response Protocol for Severe Smoke Episodes](#) is intended to provide guidance for the state and federal agencies in Oregon who respond to severe smoke episodes caused by large or long-duration wildfires, to ensure a coordinated response, in order to mitigate impacts on public health.
- If burned, seek medical attention.
 - Cover burns to reduce infection and further injury.
- If trapped in your home be sure to do the following:

- Call 911.
- Turn on lights to increase visibility.
- Keep all doors, windows, vents and fire screens closed.
- Keep doors unlocked.
- Fill sinks and tubs with water.
- Stay inside, away from outside walls and windows.

After a wildfire

- Return home after officials have deemed it safe.
- Check your home for embers (including the attic) as winds may have blown them into the home.
- Check with authorities about the safest way to dispose of potentially hazardous and flammable materials.
 - Cleaning products
 - Paint/paint products
 - Fuel

Press Releases

Templates

MEDIA RELEASE

Date
NR 1

MEDIA CONTACT:

Name

Phone Number

Email

Title

Subtitle (as needed)

Location, Ore –Due to the current wildfires in [area], residents with respiratory or heart disease, the elderly and children, are advised to stay indoors. Poor air quality conditions are a health threat and should be avoided by all residents in smoky communities. Local smoke levels can rise and fall rapidly depending on weather factors, including wind direction.

Take the following precautions to avoid breathing problems or other symptoms from smoke:

- Be aware of smoke concentrations in your area. Go to Oregon Smoke blog <<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>> or call 2-1-1 Info.
- Avoid outdoor exertion during such conditions. Avoid strenuous outdoor activity including sports practice, work and recreation.
- Drink a lot of water; staying hydrated can keep your airways moist which will help reduce symptoms of respiratory irritation such as scratchy throat, running nose and coughing.
- Avoid driving in smoky areas. If you do need to drive in these areas, keep your windows rolled up and vents closed. If you need air conditioning, make sure you set your system on re-circulate to avoid bringing smoke into your car.
- People with concerns about health issues, including those suffering from asthma or other respiratory problems, should follow their breathing management plans; keep medications on hand and contact healthcare providers if necessary.

MEDIA RELEASE

Date
NR 1

MEDIA CONTACT:

Name

Phone Number

Email

Title

Subtitle (as needed)

Location, Ore. – There is a wildfire **location** named **title** and people residing in the area should be aware of a potential evacuation order. Be aware of the danger, monitor emergency service sources and local media for information. The fire threatens **area**.

Details about the conflagration.

Those persons who will need additional time to exit an area or have health conditions (especially respiratory conditions that could be made worse by smoke) should consider leaving now. You are encouraged to prepare or even move livestock and pets out of the area. Be prepared to leave if conditions worsen.

A Level # Evacuation means “**LEVEL**” to evacuate for all persons residing in the **area**.

Details on evacuation level.

Approved Oregon Evacuation Levels

LEVEL 1: A Level 1 Evacuation means “BE READY” for potential evacuation. Residents should be aware of the danger that exists in their area, monitor emergency services websites and local media outlets for information. This is the time for preparation and precautionary movement of persons with special needs, mobile property and (under certain circumstances) pets and livestock. If conditions worsen, emergency services personnel may contact you via an emergency notification system.

LEVEL 2: A Level 2 Evacuation means “BE SET” to evacuate. YOU MUST PREPARE TO LEAVE AT A MOMENTS NOTICE This level indicates there is significant danger to your area, and residents should either voluntarily relocate to a shelter or with family/friends outside of the affected area, or if choosing to remain, to be ready to evacuate at a moment’s notice. Residents MAY have time to gather necessary items, but doing so is at their own risk. THIS MAY BE THE ONLY NOTICE THAT YOU RECEIVE Emergency services cannot guarantee that they will be able to notify you if conditions rapidly deteriorate. Area media services will be asked to broadcast periodic updates.

LEVEL 3: A Level 3 Evacuation means “GO” Evacuate NOW LEAVE IMMEDIATELY! Danger to your area is current or imminent, and you should evacuate immediately. If you choose to ignore this advisement, you must understand that emergency services may not be available to assist you further. DO NOT delay leaving to gather any belongings or make efforts to protect your home. THIS WILL BE THE LAST NOTICE THAT YOU RECEIVE Entry to evacuated areas may be denied until conditions are safe. Area radio and TV stations have been asked to broadcast periodic updates.

Samples

The following is a press release by the Oregon Department of Forestry on July 29, 2015 regarding the 2015 wildfire season.

High Temperatures and Threat of Lightning Forecasted

As the heat returns to the region this week, fire managers are once again spreading the word of caution in efforts to prevent human-caused fires. Fire weather meteorologists are anticipating temperatures in the high 90s and low 100s midweek with a chance of lightning in southern and eastern Oregon arriving Friday. A Red Flag Warning is also in effect for much of the Willamette Valley and southern Oregon calling for hot and dry unstable conditions combined with low fuel moisture levels.

As fire season hits full stride, the chances of fires starting and spreading rapidly are of grave concern.

“We’re looking at a formidable fire weather forecast,” said Oregon State Forester Doug Decker. “The benefit of any recent moisture we’ve received has now evaporated, and we’re looking straight at record-breaking temperatures, extremely low humidity and dry lightning – the trifecta of bad wildfire conditions.”

“This is the time for all Oregonians and visitors to be extremely aware of fire danger. One wrong move with power equipment, a cigarette, or any open flame can spell trouble.”

Homeowners and outdoor enthusiasts alike can contribute to the fire prevention campaign by reducing fire prone activities. Campfires are only allowed in designated campgrounds on public lands and prohibited entirely on all private lands under ODF’s protection. Outdoor debris burning also remains prohibited throughout much of the state. While logging activity is being curtailed under these extreme conditions, many large industrial landowners have also closed their gates to public access in efforts to reduce possible ignitions from off-road driving, target shooting, smoking and campfires; all of these activities are illegal during fire season.

Should a fire occur close to communities, State Fire Marshal Jim Walker is urging homeowners to be prepared in case an evacuation is necessary. “A serious wildfire can come up in a moment’s notice, so residents need to prepare now in case they have to leave their home, Walker said. “Make sure to put together a “Go Kit” and make a plan where your family will go and how you will stay in contact.” Find out more at www.wildlandfirersg.org.

To date, 621 fires have burned 3,393 acres on lands protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry and forest protective associations. Of these, 429 have been caused by people. ODF protects about 16 million acres of private and public forest and grazing land from wildfire in Oregon.

The following is a press release by the Oregon Department of Forestry on April 27, 2015.

May is Wildfire Awareness Month, “Wildfire Knows No Season”

May is Oregon Wildfire Awareness Month. Oregon experiences its heaviest wildfire activity during the summer, but fires occur all seasons of the year including spring. During May, the Oregon Department of Forestry, Keep Oregon Green, the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal, and fire educators are spreading the word about wildfire prevention and the steps Oregonians can take to stop most fires before they start.

At stake: Lives, property, forests

When it comes to preventing wildfires, there’s a lot at stake – lives, personal property, and the many values provided by Oregon’s forests and rangelands. During the 2014 season, 1.3 million acres in the Northwest were consumed by wildfire, which includes 868,399 in Oregon and 425,136 in Washington.

The total cost to date exceeds \$460 million.

Closer to home, 705 human-caused fires burned around 20,000 acres on lands protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry, nearly six times the 10-year average acres. ODF’s gross large-fire costs were \$75.6 million, and timber losses totaled roughly \$227 million. The fires destroyed numerous homes, threatened large communities and decimated key fish and wildlife habitats.

Wildfires can start at home

Wildfires that occur in the wildland-urban interface often are started by human activity and then spread to the forest. Once underway a fire follows the fuel, whether it is trees or houses.

“Simple prevention strategies will make the strongest impact in keeping your home, family and community safe,” said Kristin Babbs, president of the Keep Oregon Green Association.

Spring is the perfect time, she said, to remove dead flammable vegetation and limb up trees around the yard.

To get an early start on Wildfire Awareness Month, join your neighbors and reduce your community wildfire risk by taking part in National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day on Saturday, May 2. The National Fire Protection Association has teamed up with State Farm Insurance to encourage residents to commit a couple of hours, or the entire day, to help raise wildfire awareness and work together on projects that can help protect homes and entire communities from the threat of wildfire.

Coming soon: More Wildfire Awareness Month tips

During May, Keep Oregon Green will promote a new wildfire prevention message via traditional and social media each week to help homeowners and recreationists learn how to prevent their outdoor activities from sparking the next wildfire. For more information, visit the websites for Keep Oregon Green at www.keeporeongreen.org, the Oregon Department of Forestry at www.oregon.gov/odf and the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center at www.nwccweb.us. Follow Oregon wildfire news and prevention updates on social media: Twitter @keeporeongreen, @ORDeptForestry and Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/keeporeongreen>; <https://www.facebook.com/oregondepartmentofforestry>.

To learn how you can help create and maintain fire-adapted communities in the Pacific Northwest, visit <http://pnwfac.weebly.com> and follow on Twitter @PNWFAC.

The following is a press release by the Keep Oregon Green Association on May 18, 2015.

Prevent your campfire from turning into a wildfire

Sitting around a campfire is one of the special times we all enjoy, but campfires are also a major cause of wildfires. May is Wildfire Awareness Month, and Keep Oregon Green, the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal, and the Oregon Department of Forestry urge Oregonians to follow these basic outdoor safety tips:

- Know before you go – Call your local forestry or fire district to learn if there are any current campfire restrictions at your recreation destination. An interactive map of Oregon's fire restrictions is available at www.keeporegongreen.org.
- Kick the campfire habit this summer – Portable camp stoves are a safer option to campfires at any time of year. Areas that prohibit campfires outside maintained campgrounds with established fire pits will often allow the use of camp stoves.
- Select the right spot – Where campfires are allowed, avoid building the fire near your tent, structures, vehicles, shrubs and trees, and be aware of low-hanging branches overhead. Clear the site down to mineral soil, at least five feet on all sides, and circle your campfire site with rocks. Store your unused firewood a good distance from the fire.
- Keep your campfire small – A campfire is less likely to escape control if it is kept small. A large fire may cast hot embers long distances. Add firewood in small amounts as existing material is consumed.
- Attend your campfire at all times – A campfire left unattended for only a few minutes can grow into a costly, damaging wildfire. Staying with your campfire from start to finish until dead out is required by state law, to ensure that any escaped sparks or embers can be extinguished quickly.
- NEVER use gasoline or other accelerants (flammable or combustible liquids) to start or increase your campfire. Once the fire is ignited, wait until the match is cold and then discard it in the fire.
- Always have water and fire tools on site – Have a shovel and a bucket of water nearby to extinguish any escaped embers. When you are ready to leave, drown all embers with water, stir the coals, and drown again. Repeat until the fire is DEAD out. If it is too hot to touch, it is too hot to leave.
- Burn ONLY wood – State regulations prohibit the open burning of any material that creates dense, toxic smoke or noxious odors.
- Escaped campfires are costly – The Oregon Department of Forestry spent more than \$3.3 million in 2014 to suppress unattended and escaped campfires. State law requires the proper clearing, building, attending and extinguishing of open fires any time of year. A first-time citation carries a \$110 fine. If your campfire spreads out of control, you are responsible for the cost of fire suppression. This can range from a few hundred to thousands of dollars.

During Wildfire Awareness Month visit the Keep Oregon Green website, www.keeporegongreen.org for other wildfire prevention tips.

Social Media Messaging

The following are suggested social media engagement tools and can be posted directly or edited to suit your agency's needs. When posting on Twitter and Facebook use the event hashtag, other commonly used hashtags or combinations.

Commonly used hashtags:

#OregonEM
#ORFire
#Wildfire
#WildfireSafety

Videos and Multimedia

It is best to accompany social media posts with photos and videos whenever possible.

Videos:

[Fire is Everyone's Fight](#)
[Have Two Ways Out](#)

Graphics:

[Wildfire Safety](#)
[Heating Safety](#)

Twitter Messages

The following messages can be posted to your agency's local twitter account. We encourage you to retweet messages from [@OregonOEM](#) and tag OEM in your tweets.

Twitter accounts to watch and retweet:

[@OregonGovBrown](#) – Oregon Governor Kate Brown
[@OSFM](#) – Oregon State Fire Marshal
[@ORDeptForestry](#) – Oregon Department of Forestry
[@RedCrossCasc](#) – American Red Cross Cascades Region
[@NFPA](#) – National Fire Protection Agency

Scripted Tweets

Check oregonsmoke.blogspot.com for the latest information on air quality and #wildfire updates

Drink lots of water! Stay hydrated to minimize health effects from #wildfire smoke

Learn what to do before, during and after a #Wildfire by visiting www.ready.gov/wildfires #WildfireSafety

Create a "Defensible Space" around your home to protect it from #Wildfire. Clear the area 30' away from your home.

Connect garden hoses and fill garbage cans, tubs or other large containers with water to protect home from #Wildfire

Facebook Messages

The following messages can be posted to your agency's local Facebook account. We encourage you to share posts from the [Oregon Office of Emergency Management](#) and tag OEM in your posts.

Facebook Accounts to watch and share:

[Oregon Office of Emergency Management](#)

[Oregon Office of the State Fire Marshal](#)

[Oregon Department of Forestry](#)

[National Fire Protection Agency \(NFPA\)](#)

[Red Cross Cascades Region](#)

Scripted Posts

1. Here's a few helpful reminders on how to best help the wildfire conditions in Oregon.
 - Prevent any new fires - please be careful!
 - Be aware of the status of wildfires in your area.
 - Heed the advice of emergency officials regarding evacuations.
 - Clear flammable items away from your home.
 - Have an emergency plan and kit.
 - Be aware of smoke and unhealthy air conditions.
2. Smoky or hazy conditions reduce visibility while driving. Avoid driving in smoky areas. If you do, keep your windows rolled up and vents closed. If you need air conditioning, make sure you set your system on re-circulate to avoid bringing smoke into your car.
3. Prepare your home before the start of wildfire season. Clean the roof and the gutters of debris. Maintain a 'defensible space' around your home of at least 30 feet. Clear out anything that could burn like a wood pile, dried leaves or other brush. Check and refill your emergency kit in case you have to evacuate quickly. Review your homeowner's insurance and update any new items. For more information check [ready.gov](#).
4. Know the [Oregon evacuation levels](#) and heed the advice of emergency management officials.
 - Level 1: Be Ready. There is an incident in the area and residents should be aware of the danger. Monitor media outlets for information and gather items in case an evacuation is issued.
 - Level 2: Be Set. There is significant danger in the area and residents should leave voluntarily or be prepared to leave at a moment's notice. If conditions deteriorate rapidly, emergency services cannot guarantee they will be able to provide notification.
 - Level 3: Go. Danger is current or imminent and residents should evacuate immediately.