

5.2.3 Community Engagement and Resilience Building

Building community resilience is an essential way to reduce wildfire risk, as it empowers residents to make change in their own neighborhoods, rather than having to wait for governmental funding and capacity to reach them. This capacity building can also better link residents with fire districts and other fire mitigation partners to best identify community needs and improve information sharing.

Objectives of strategies in this section are to increase resilience through risk-aware, self-supporting communities and to ensure that communities have the information needed to keep them safer from wildfire, delivered in ways that are accessible and usable.

Because of the Eagle Creek Fire and the 2020 Oregon wildfire season, as well as recognition of increasing climate-driven risks, awareness of wildfire risk is very high among some county residents. In a recent survey conducted as part of the Multnomah County NHMP update, wildfire was rated as the fourth most concerning hazard, after earthquake, wildfire smoke, and extreme heat—all hazards with a wider geographical scope.

However, there is still much to be done in continuing to communicate risk to new residents and those who may not be aware of their risk—and to maintain risk awareness if there are upcoming periods with lower fire activity.

Firewise Communities and Other Neighborhood-Level Organizations



Figure 39 - Firewise USA logo

[Firewise USA](#) is a national program administered through the National Fire Protection Association that provides a framework for residents in a local area to organize and develop neighborhood-driven wildfire mitigation strategies, especially for defensible space of homes. The national program provides materials, publicity, and support for groups to help build their program, and local fire districts have provided technical expertise to help these programs build their capacity. There are also some grants that give priority to projects in Firewise communities, and some fire insurance policies have discounts for homeowners who are part of the program.

It is not necessary for neighborhood groups interested in wildfire mitigation to join Firewise USA specifically, although the success of groups already formed in Multnomah County provides a model for how new groups can be formed and supported. But any network building between neighbors to share resources and information will increase their resilience ahead of the next wildfire disaster.

Public Messaging and Engagement

Wildfire resilience also requires that residents are aware of risk and have pre-event knowledge of alert messaging and evacuation protocols, whether they are at their residences, or where they work or recreate.

Evacuation levels are an example of a public messaging priority. When disaster strikes, having existing awareness of these levels will reduce confusion and inaction at a time when decisions must be made quickly. Promotion of [Public Alerts](#), an opt-in messaging service, is another way to raise risk awareness and preparation.

Levels Of Evacuation

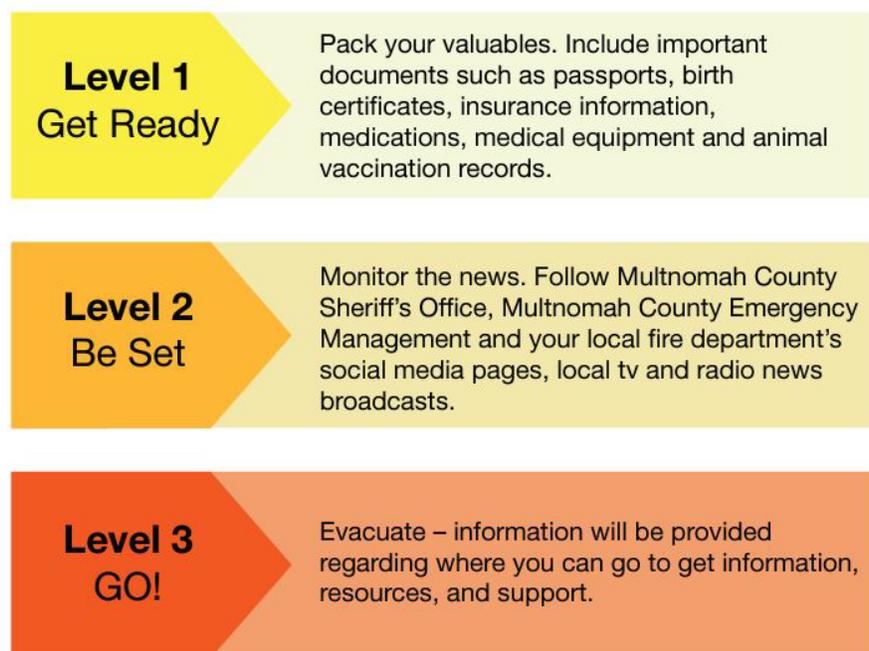


Figure 40 - [Multnomah County evacuation levels](#). Often the time between Level 2 and Level 3 can be very short.

Equity Considerations

- Outreach materials have limitations in reaching some residents and need to use a variety of methods and mediums to reach the whole community.

Chapter 5 – Wildfire Topic – Community Engagement and Resilience Building

- Building Firewise USA communities or other neighborhood level organizations may be more difficult for residents with less resources and time to dedicate to wildfire risk reduction.

Mitigation Strategies	Lead Agency/Jurisdiction
Continue to work on community preparedness for evacuations, including planning for moving livestock and other evacuation barriers faced by rural residents.	Corbett Fire
Develop strategies for adopting, funding, and implementing National Fire Protection Association Community Risk Reduction Standards within the Life Safety Division of Gresham Fire, to enhance education and prevention initiatives in Wildland Urban Interface areas.	Gresham Fire
Conduct annual community meetings in high-risk areas, including the East Buttes and Springwater Corridor, to educate residents about defensible space and other measures to reduce structural ignitability. Use meetings to solicit feedback on wildfire risk-reduction projects that would have wide community support.	Gresham Fire
Assist in developing a community-driven pre-disaster plan and other strategies for strengthening community response outside of the City of Gresham limits, particularly in neighborhoods with one-in, one-out road access.	Gresham Fire
Provide wildfire risk education and home assessment assistance in communities that are in high risk locations, and encourage them to become certified Firewise communities.	Lake Oswego Fire
Encourage communities to develop a neighborhood driven pre-disaster plan including evacuation routes, telephone call-down trees, and other strategies for strengthening community response.	Lake Oswego Fire
Work directly with communities targeted for fuels reduction treatments to gain support for projects prior to implementation.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Conduct community meetings in areas of the city located in wildfire hazard zones to educate communities on defensible space and measures that can be taken to reduce structural ignitability, and work towards becoming Firewise Communities.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Educate landowners in the Wildland Urban Interface about reducing wildfire hazards, and encourage them to participate in the Firewise Program.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Establish an information network, developing community risk reduction classes to educate homeowners on ways to reduce the risk of wildfires and learning about fire-resistant plants, and signing-up volunteers sign-up for fuel mitigation events in established Firewise Communities	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Implement a model Firewise and ecologically sound landscaping project at Portland's Fire and Rescue Station 27 in Forest Park. Scope and seek funding for a project to explore and demonstrate defensible space, planting and landscaping options for fire-resistive native groundcover, shrubs and mature trees to achieve goals for wildfire protection and watershed health. Design and install one or more demonstration areas to showcase wildfire resistant plantings.	Portland Fire & Rescue

Mitigation Strategies	Lead Agency/Jurisdiction
Develop and distribute Wildland Urban Interface information to Communities at Risk located in wildfire hazard zones.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Promote the use of 211 telephone information system and signing-up for PublicAlerts.org to inform residents about what actions to take during wildfires and other emergencies.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Utilize active community organizations' social media networks to engage residents including electronic newsletters and links on websites.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Empower community leaders to remain engaged and continue to motivate the community through partnership with local fire departments and Firewise/USA program.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Encourage Communities at Risk located in wildfire hazard zones to become certified Firewise Communities.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Use active websites with changing banners and coordinated Twitter messaging (and other appropriate social media) to get people's attention.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Use QR codes to reach people who use those information mediums to encourage PublicAlerts.org signups and learn about wildfire risks, and post codes in parks and natural areas.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Develop a listing of outreach events that organizations and active citizen groups in Communities at Risk may be planning to identify outreach partnership opportunities.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Provide presentations to organizations that meet regularly and have high visibility in the community: Neighborhood Associations, Granges, Rotaries, Sierra Club, BARK, Garden Clubs, Audubon Society, World Forestry Center, etc.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Develop a listing of outreach events of organizations and active citizen groups to identify opportunities for partner outreach.	Portland Parks & Recreation
Support the development of a Firewise Community in Holbrook.	Scappoose Fire
Continue periodic public trainings, webinars, and presentations to reduce wildfire ignition risk and increase home resilience.	Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue
Continue to provide social media, educational information and handouts that encourage residents' ability to be self-sufficient in managing risk on their properties.	Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue
Gather survey information from unhoused residents about unmet needs and community wildfire risk awareness.	Multnomah County Emergency Management
Provide simple, graphic-based materials for homeless service contractors to distribute to unhoused communities before each wildfire season. Materials could address wildfire risk reduction, evacuation messaging, and how to limit wildfire smoke vulnerability.	Multnomah County Emergency Management
Explore ways to foster countywide Firewise Community coordination for sharing of information, best practices, and mutual support. Determine if there are ways for existing Firewise Communities to provide support to new groups with an interest in neighborhood-based resilience.	Multnomah County Emergency Management