

FIRE INFORMATION:

Educating Forest Neighbors

During a 2003 Michigan wildfire, private residents adjacent to the local forest saw the positive results of their fire prone property protection efforts. They had taken the time to remove woodpiles, debris, and brush piles away from their residences. They had also raked leaves and kept the grass mowed. One owner, though, lost a cabin, trailer, two sheds, and a garage because long grass and leaves were left unattended rather than removed before the spring fire season. The local forest understands that educating these fire prone property owners is a continuous effort and is committed to the process.

Lesson Learned: The forest now uses the striking visual examples from this fire to illustrate that homeowner efforts really are effective. The results of this project are now being incorporated into the local Firewise and other community education programs. In addition, the summer seasonal fire staff is being tasked with conducting door to door visits to explain these property protection techniques. These visits will include distributing pamphlets regarding protection techniques to fire prone property owners. To view photographs of how properties can be protected through private property owner efforts, go to:

http://www.wildfirelessons.net/After_Incident_Reports/2003_AIRs/Type_4/East_Lake_Mikel_AIR.pdf

Enhancing Incident Information

As the public requests more information during wildland fires, information officers are utilizing a variety of tools. In addition to traditional press releases and media updates, information posted on Incident Web sites can provide near real time updates to the general public. These Web sites have been known to receive thousands of hits per day on large incidents.

Other useful communication tools include regular community meetings as well as identifying community-gathering places such as post offices and grocery stores, and then setting up information trap lines with bulletin boards and handouts at these locations. In addition, scheduled open houses at the incident command post (ICP), media tours of the ICP, and updates provided through the local community television channels and other local media outlets are all avenues that can foster incident related communications with the local general public.

During community meetings, past feedback indicates that interactive Power Point presentations can be effective when they include video footage of the fire and various area and incident maps to help explain the suppression objectives and containment progress. These types of visual aids are also helpful in explaining to the lay public both the magnitude of the incident and physical limits of the committed resources in their ability to obtain these containment objectives.

Effectiveness of Town Meetings

During the initial attack phases of two large Southwest Oregon wildland fires, a Type 2 IMT assigned to the incidents took immediate action to provide answers to the public's growing number of questions and concerns. The IMT set up multiple town meetings in local communities and arranged for the incident commander, operations section chief, and an agency administrator to be present to provide updated briefings and answer questions. These early town meetings proved instrumental in disseminating accurate first-hand information to the local communities and media. They also helped establish rapport and credibility, well before the fires grew in size and complexity.

Prepared by:
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