



## Research Brief for Resource Managers

**Release:**

December 2013

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### Educating homeowners about wildfire

McCaffrey, S. M. 2004. *Fighting Fire with Education: What is the best way to reach out to homeowners?* *Journal of Forestry* 102(5): 12-19.  
<http://www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/12304>

McCaffrey (2004) investigated what types of information are most useful to increase public support concerning defensible space, prescribed burning, and thinning activities. She addressed this question using 273 mail surveys from homeowners in Incline Village, NV (1998).

McCaffrey found that homeowners who received information delivered by television were less likely to implement defensible space, potentially because of the detached nature of the education. Interestingly, ninety-five percent of respondents who rarely or never used TV had implemented defensible space.

Homeowners used newspapers and magazine articles, followed by educational materials, more than other media to understand wildfire hazard and management tools. Fire departments and school programs (for those families with children) ranked high as a useful source of information. Individuals who read newspapers and other media recognized both the hazard and their own personal role in defensible space. These media also provided a positive effect on understanding and acceptance of prescribed burning by agencies, however there was neutral to lower acceptance for thinning operations. Newspaper/ magazine users were more likely to have implemented defensible space, while educational material users were more likely to have an evacuation plan. In

#### Management Implications

- Newspapers and magazines were a common source of information yet had limited influence on homeowner response to wildfire management and mitigation.
- Television had a negative impact on homeowner response to implementing defensible space.
- A combination of in person delivery of educational material and personal contact is the most effective method for educating about wildfire management and mitigation.

general, these media lack detailed information, and therefore had limited value on homeowners. While educational materials increased risk perception, they reached a wider audience when they were personally delivered.

Support for controversial aspects of fuels management increased when individuals had government and/or personal contacts. Agencies increased support for thinning operations, while individual contacts increased support for prescribed burning. Individuals who attended neighborhood meetings were 17% more likely to have implemented defensible space and to see fire hazard as a significant issue, even though many individuals reported that they thought these meetings were not useful. In this study, personalized contact, combined with direct delivery of education materials was the most effective method of educating about wildfire management and mitigation.