

Ready, Set, Go!

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT DEPARTMENT OUTREACH



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Any member, regardless of their size or resource capability, can make a difference in how individuals adopt defensible space education tools; understand situational awareness when a fire starts; and act early when called. It is important that you assess the threat of wildland fire to the residents you serve and your organization's available time. Your outreach efforts may be similar to those suggested below, or take on a new approach. Either way, engaging with the residents you serve spreads the wildland fire safety message and gains beneficial connections between your organization and residents before a fire occurs.

It is important to localize the program message, so residents see themselves, your organization, and their community in it. There is a large gradient of outreach examples and no outreach effort is considered too small. Remember that in an awareness program, building local understanding can start with just one event. Existing presentations your personnel may already give and your annual open house are great opportunities to reach your audience, simply include the Ready, Set, Go! (RSG) message in your existing plan. The outreach tools detailed below are gathered from effective practices from your fellow RSG! Program members since the program went national in April of 2011. This document reviews 5 effective methods of outreach. They include:

- *Participation in a single event;*
- *Homeowner and civic groups;*
- *Local media;*
- *Door-to-door appeals*
- *Connecting with local wildland fire programs to help deliver the preparedness message and make connections with individuals before a fire event.*

Presenting at a Single Event

Consider adding some comments about wildland fire preparedness into public events you may already be doing. These can build awareness just as successfully and are valuable for you to deliver as an organization. Towns, civic and community groups, fire departments, and public safety agencies all host widely attended events during the year that draw a diverse collection of residents to a single location. RSG members who adopted this outreach method had a presence at elementary school Halloween parades, summer festivals, National Night Out events, Fire Department community events, and scheduled clean-up days in communities that have adopted wildland fire preparedness programs. Occasions like these allow organizations to interact with diverse individuals in one place, for a set period of time.

You may already participate in such events, so include RSG materials in your public education packets. Some departments successfully hosted their own events. A challenge to consider in some areas is that a “single topic event” on wildland fire may not resonate with the public as well as a similar presentation at a widely attended event.

Homeowners Associations and Civic Groups

While individual homes and sub-divisions in the wildland urban interface vary from area to area, many have homeowner associations or representation groups. Many RSG members found success in their door-to-door appeals and group meetings by working through these representative homeowner groups. The program starter kit includes a template invitation letter that a member can use to approach a group in their service area. The presentation PowerPoint template and a print ready PDF of the RSG *Personal Wildland Fire Action Guide* booklet are effective tools at these meetings. The starter kit also includes the design files for the action guide if your organization wishes to further adapt the guide to reflect localized pictures and additional messaging.

RSG members found that homeowner’s groups provided the necessary localized legitimacy for the wildland fire preparedness message to the residents. These groups also can help with situational awareness understanding, identification of special needs audiences and procedures, and highlight evacuation routes for future knowledge, if evacuations are a part of your local response protocols. Similar presentations were also successfully used by RSG members with other civic groups like business and rotary groups, religious organizations, local philanthropy groups, and others. These audiences can both serve as a receptive group for the message and as future partners in its distribution.

Local Print, Radio and Television Media

As a next step of awareness outreach, some RSG members were able to engage local and regional print, radio, and television media with the wildland fire preparedness message. The program starter kit includes the national video for presentations and a design version for adaptation. Some departments had access to their city media office who bookended the national video with a localized introduction by the fire chief, explaining the local threat, and concluding with the organization’s contact information. Another member worked with a local television station that was interested in public safety messaging and partnered with local insurance agents to fund their own RSG video. This followed the same message, but was able to illustrate local environment, housing and stock department members. The starter kit includes a guidelines document for video efforts and we encourage you to both utilize the national video and augment it to best engage the people you serve.

Departments were able to get both the national video and localized versions viewed on public access channels, during movie previews as a PSA, and on local television stations because of its public safety and awareness appeal. Local radio stations also have shows that can highlight your safety message and reach diverse residents. Members have worked with local developers to share time on radio shows and

explain the wildland fire preparedness issue. RSG members who have experience with media outreach note that it is important to consider timing. Members found that while messages can be delivered, the threats may be a forgotten memory. Make sure to identify your typical fire season and direct your messaging effort at the best times to engage with the media. Most importantly do not be discouraged, any messaging will take time.

Door-to-Door Outreach

Personnel meeting individuals at their door to deliver a public safety message has a tremendous and positive impact. It heightens the importance of the message and reinforces the value of your organization to residents. Many RSG members achieved this level of involvement by directing their efforts upon a focused wildland urban interface area, a singular housing community in one instance or a section of a community in another. Departments utilized home assessments provided by the fire service to connect with the resident, bring the wildland fire issue into an understandable context, and offer simple solutions for action. Other wildland fire public education programs and your state forestry department provide such home assessment tools for your local area. Home assessments also permitted members to highlight “acres covered” for Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) and even state funding through various agencies. Investigate what your state has to offer.

Many members found that because they were legitimately delivering a public safety message, they were in accordance with local solicitation laws, which you should review in your area first. Developing a “leave-behind” is important. The RSG *Personal Wildland Fire Action Guide* booklet and door hanger are examples of resources provided to members for free. Members worked with local partners to create a door hanging bag that could contain program material, partner material, and information about your department or organization for those not home.

Connecting with Existing Preparedness Programs

RSG! Program departments that have existing preparedness programs in their service areas found these community groups to be successful partners for encouraging existing preparedness efforts and sharing important information on situational awareness when a fire starts and acting early. Residents already engaged in some level of wildland fire preparation have an appreciation for action. They may not be familiar with your organization though, or the resources available if an event occurs. These meetings will be noticed by others, who may be interested in adopting initial practices.

The RSG! Programs work in complimentary and collaborative fashion with other wildland fire public education programs to amplify their messages to individuals and better achieve the common endeavor we all share of fire-adapted communities. RSG is endorsed by the U.S. Forest Service. In their outreach efforts, some departments also found beneficial partnerships with local Fire Corps programs and Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) in delivering the program.

Let us know of new ideas and methods to share with your fellow RSG! Program members through the Achievement Management System (AMS) found on our website at www.wildlandfireRSG.org. The lessons you can share today will benefit many others.



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