

# **Public Affairs/Communications Plan**

## **California Fire Alliance**

March 6, 2002

### **Introduction**

The California Fire Alliance is an interagency forum formed to support and encourage pre-fire suppression activities that enhance public safety, minimize wildfire costs and losses, and maintain or improve environmental quality. It seeks to achieve these ends through more effective coordination that will better integrate the member agency efforts.

This public affairs/communication plan provides a strategic approach and set of suggested actions designed to aid the Alliance in meeting its goals as defined in the Alliance's charter.

#### **Those goals include:**

- (1) working with communities to develop community based planning leadership and facilitate the development of community fire loss mitigation plans**
- (2) assist communities in developing fire loss mitigation projects**
- (3) provide outreach to increase awareness of wildland fire protection program opportunities available to communities**
- (4) develop, modify, and maintain a comprehensive list of communities at risk.**

To be effective, this plan would need to be implemented over the longer term and revised as necessary.

### **Public Affairs/Communications Plan Goals**

- Enhance commitment of stakeholders to cooperative efforts in protecting the public and resources at risk from wildfire.
- Build understanding of the need for cooperative efforts to address wildfire hazards in California.

### **Key Audiences**

- Federal and State elected officials
- Tribal governments and organizations
- Local Elected officials
- Local Communities and organizations (e.g. Fire Safe Councils, Resource Conservation Districts etc.)
- Regional organizations
- Local Fire Agencies
- Agency employees
- Media

## Objectives

These are specific objectives for targeted audiences

### **Federal/State/Local Elected Officials**

As a result of communication activities, Federal/State/Local elected officials will:

- Characterize fire planning funding as well spent
- Characterize wildfire tactics and strategies as effective
- Characterize efforts as cooperative and focused on local accomplishments
- Acknowledge the contribution and participation of each level of government

### **Local communities, Tribes, and Local/Regional Organizations**

As a result of public affairs/communications activities, local communities, tribes, and local/regional organizations will:

- Participate in planning/implementation of efforts to reduce wildfire risk
- Agree they have an active voice in and can influence local planning
- Agree there is a problem to be addressed and a long-term, on-going effort is needed to address it
- Can describe where to get information on grants to help implement needed actions.

### **Internal Audiences**

As a result of public affairs/communications activities, internal audiences will:

- Agree that no single agency or single approach can adequately address the wildfire hazard problem.
- Agree that a unified message is important.

## Public Affairs/Communications Plan Strategy Overview

This strategy recommends emphasis in three areas: (1) Outreach to communities, tribes, internal audiences, and local/regional organizations; (2) progress reporting to local, state, and federal elected officials; and (3) investing in community relationships. Emphasis is placed on doing actions in an interagency manner with an interagency emphasis.

Outreach is designed to meet awareness and knowledge objectives in the target audiences. This may include presentations to local or regional organizations and governmental bodies (e.g. boards of supervisors); targeted, local media stories targeted to reach local community audiences; tribal council/organization briefings; internet provided information; articles in internal newsletters; etc.

Periodic progress reporting to local, state, and federal elected officials is also designed to meet awareness and knowledge objectives, emphasizing that actions are being taken. This may include state and local elected representative staff briefings, field or site trips for staff or elected officials, presentations to local boards of supervisors. An interagency emphasis here is particularly important to help communicate the message of cooperation and integration. Briefings and field/site trips would focus on what the member agencies are doing to address the problem and what the agencies are doing to help local communities.

The third area of emphasis invests in community relationships by providing assistance to communities in planning actions that help reduce the threat of wildfire losses. This may involve providing technical assistance to communities through fire safe councils and other

community organizations in building a community wildfire threat reduction plan, building capacity in communities without current resources to develop a plan, increasing awareness of grant resources and providing assistance in developing grant proposals, and, with community assistance, identifying projects on Alliance member Agency lands that contribute to community threat reduction plans. It may also involve building capacity in Alliance member Agency personnel to provide community assistance.

### Specific Actions and Communications tools

Action	Who	When	comments
Develop coordinated key messages.		done	These would be used by Alliance members in outreach communications
Develop coordinated local media releases focused on Agency and/or community accomplishments.		ongoing	These would be designed to increase awareness of Agency actions to address the problem and highlight cooperative agency/community efforts.
Identify communication tools needed to support presentations to local, regional organizations. Develop materials and provide to field representatives of Alliance members.			These may include a presentation outline, key messages, a power point program for presentations where powerpoint is possible/applicable.
Develop simple publication outlining Fire Alliance mission, etc.		done	This could be used as an additional information piece to compliment other communications.
Develop briefing materials for federal, state, local elected officials. Determine strategy for conducting briefings (i.e. who briefs who when).		In development	These will consist of a single page summarizing accomplishments across agency boundaries, supplemented by single page briefs for each Alliance member.
Identify State/Federal elected representative staffs that might benefit most from field or site visits. Coordinate with local units to develop and execute visit.			These might be done in cooperation with local community organizations, if applicable.
Develop an annual report that summarizes and highlights member agency and community-based accomplishments in wildfire hazard/threat reductions.		In development	Information in this report would serve as the basis for information provided to elected officials, in presentations, and in media releases.
Highlight the Community Resource Guide by providing a highly visible connection to it on each Agency member internet website			
Market the Community Resource Guide to local community organizations involved in wildfire threat planning.		ongoing	Hardcopy version developed and distributed.
Provide items for internal employee newsletters.			This would apply to Alliance members with internal employee communication tools.
Identify successful local community planning efforts, summarize in a short "case study" format, and make available as reference for other local communities, agencies.			This might be provided via internet. It would also include contact names and phone numbers.
Develop a workshop targeted at field			This might offer successful case

employees of Alliance member Agencies designed to build capacity in field units to work with communities in developing community-based efforts.			studies, tools, tips, resources, etc.  The Alliance is looking at bringing in 4-6 Firewise workshops. These would be targeted for strategic locations within the state.
Develop Interactive website presence			A Fire Alliance website is currently being developed that will have the potential for an interactive presence.

## Key Messages

**California faces a wildfire management challenge that has been 100 years in the making.** A variety of factors have resulted in many areas becoming unnaturally dense with vegetation, increasing the risk of catastrophic wildfire and severe damage to communities and natural resources. This is compounded by a dramatic influx of people, homes, and communities into California’s wildlands.

**Successfully addressing this challenge demands a cooperative, integrated effort that moves beyond jurisdictional boundaries and embraces local communities at risk.** The scope of the problem exceeds the ability of any one agency, state, federal, or local, to address on a comprehensive basis, yet heavily relies on local actions by agencies and communities.

**The California Fire Alliance seeks to better coordinate state, local, and federal agency actions to address the problem and to provide assistance to local communities in developing local strategic plans and actions.**