

## **Overcoming Common Obstacles to Action**

### **Assessing A Neighbor Or Friends Level Of Readiness**

Homeowners will not activate unless they are first aware that there is a threat of wildfire with associated risks to their person and property, and those risks exist to them and within their neighborhood/area.

Once Homeowners recognize wildfire as a problem, raise awareness that there is something that they as individuals and members of their neighborhood/community, can do to minimize those risks and be more prepared for wildfire. Give concrete ideas, but not necessarily details, about the kinds of actions they can take as homeowners, such as creating defensible space, having an evacuation plan, improving their access, reducing the ignitability of their home and other structures, etc. Help them set achievable goals.

Homeowners who understand that there may be a risk to them, will probably want to know more about what their specific risks are. This is an opportunity to help the homeowner find out what they can do on their individual property, and to begin dropping hints about how mitigation on their property would affect their neighbors and to start seeking out landscape scale projects that would benefit the whole community. Find out what you can do for them. Also, general inferences about an area based on a few home visits can garner community-specific information that will be useful in conveying to other members of the community the specific risks associated with the community, such as access, unhealthy ecosystem conditions, lack of water resources, specific topography, etc.

Once homeowners begin taking action on their property, they will certainly recognize that the problem extends beyond their property lines, and this will be a good time to get their ideas and get them engaged in community scale projects. Neighborhood level meetings can be held at this stage to do community scale planning and projects.

### **Motivation**

**Denial:** “I don’t think it is a problem where I live. It couldn’t happen to me.”

- CWPP resources
- Risk maps
- Home wildfire risk site visits for specific vulnerabilities
- State Forestry ecosystem overviews
- Specific fire history and fire regime info
- leverage “it’s not if, but when”
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**Irresponsibility:** “It’s not my job or responsibility, Firefighters are supposed to protect my home from wildfire.”

- “When residential development is exposed to extreme wildfire conditions, numerous houses can ignite and burn simultaneously, overwhelming firefighters and reducing fire protection effectiveness.” This means “the most important person in protecting a house from wildfire is NOT a firefighter, but the property owner.”
- Firefighters focus their efforts on properties that are mitigated for their personal safety and because the probability of saving properly mitigated properties is greatly increased relative to unmitigated areas.

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- University of Nevada Fire Adapted Communities and It takes a community
- Landowning Colorado Style - [http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/landowning\\_guide.pdf](http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/landowning_guide.pdf)

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**Insurance:** “That’s why I have insurance.”

- [UHhelp home inventory app](#)
- Insurance cannot replace everything and insurance is often inadequate to cover replacement needs.
- Check your policy because some require rebuilding on the same site.

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**Futility:** “What difference can I make? The problem is tremendous.”

- Mitigation success stories and photos
- Proper mitigation cannot guarantee that your property will not suffer damage; however, it will reduce the risk of property damage.
- Work from the house out, beginning inside with evacuation preparedness. Use a ‘front door to the forest’ approach when evaluation risk. And take baby steps. Don’t expect everyone to become motivated and take action over night or for all the work on any property to happen at once.
- Stress that little things can make a big difference, like eliminating combustibles under porches and keeping the grass cut.

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**Environment:** “It will be bad for the environment to cut down trees.”

- Before and after photos series and photos including wildlife in recently treated landscapes
- Mitigation can help remaining trees because competition for water is reduced. Conifers use pitch to fight against



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beetle infestation and water is necessary for the tree to produce pitch. Be specific about the ecosystem you are working in.

- Fire Ecology presentations
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**Aesthetics:** “It won’t look good. If all the trees are gone, I won’t want to live here anyway.”

- Before and after treatment photos. Compare to burned forest pics.
- Some insurance policies will only cover to rebuild on the same property. Check your policy.
- You can mitigate to protect the forest as well. Well spaced trees and tree clumps that are limbed should minimize crown fire activity, and eliminate total fire loss.
- Often privacy is unaffected by proper mitigation.
- Property values and marketability often increases following mitigation.
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**Discomfort:** “There are snakes and poison ivy out there, I can’t do the work. Besides, it’s too hot.”

- List of mitigation services
- Guidance on selecting a contractor
- Partner with neighbors when possible.
- Mitigate before fire season when temperatures are cooler, such as April or May or later, such as October or November.
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**Absentee:** “I don’t want to work on my vacation. I’m not even around for you to tell me that there is a problem. I’m not from here and don’t know enough about wildfires here to be concerned.”

- Local examples of unmitigated property value loss or home loss. Use real stories.
- “Increasing your property value” FireWise brochure Part 5, “Increasing your property value” - <http://www.southwestcoloradofires.org/library/firewise-sw-colorado/>
- Always include these landowners in any mailings and invite them to participate. It must first be understood that there is an issue.
- Seek opportunities to help whatever financial or time barriers they present once they understand the issue. Leverage the year-round homeowner’s match to grants, to include work to be done on absentee owners’ property, or do work parties to help them get work done. Anything to show that you want to support them, rather than just asking them deal with what the rest of the neighborhood sees as a problem, will help them take ownership of their property and fire mitigation work.

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- Set an example and focus on the rest of the neighborhood first. Don't expect absentee owners to be the early adopters. They may come around to recognizing the need more slowly, as they are not regularly presented with the concern.

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#### **Means**

**Cost:** "I don't have the money."

- There are simple, inexpensive steps you can take to make your home more fire resistant. Start with the low hanging fruit such as screening porches; maintaining roof free of debris; lean, clean, and green around the home; having a to-go-bag and evacuation plan for your family; have a site assessment to determine the highest priorities for your energy.
- How can you afford to do nothing when doing nothing could mean you will lose everything?
- Grants and cost-share programs
- Slash removal programs

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**Time:** "I don't have the time."

- Prioritize the simple, less time consuming actions during a home wildfire risk site visit
- List of mitigation services
- Guidance on selecting a contractor
- Partner with neighbors to get more done

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**Knowledge:** "I don't know what needs to happen or where to start."

- Home Wildfire Risk Site Visits – Contact \_\_\_\_\_
- State Forestry Publications
- Local training and learning opportunities such as how-to workshops or wildfire council meetings
- Ready, Set, Cut guidelines for creating a healthier forest
- Landowner's Guide to Thinning - [http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/landowner\\_g4thin\\_scr.pdf](http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/landowner_g4thin_scr.pdf)

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**Slash Disposal:** "I don't have a way to get rid of the slash and debris from any work that I do."

- Chipper programs

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- Lop and scatter in zone 3 - Landowner's Guide to Thinning, [http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/landowner\\_g4thin\\_scr.pdf](http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/landowner_g4thin_scr.pdf)
- Advice and burn support for slash piles – always follow local burning requirements
- Slash sites
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**Physically Unable:** “I can’t physically do the defensible space work that needs to be done.”

- List of mitigation services
- Guidance on selecting a contractor
- Seek service groups looking for projects
- Neighborhood work parties or help in other ways in exchange for physical labor
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**Maintenance:** “A firewise home will be harder or more expensive to maintain.”

- Landscaping and defensible space guidelines
- Drought tolerant and native vegetation can be fire resistant and non-combustible materials adjacent to the house are often maintenance free
- You may have to mow a little
- Plan for the maintenance when planning the mitigation actions. Example, use flagstone for the first 5 feet around the home instead of gravel to reduce maintenance with weeds growing up through gravel.
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### **Opportunity**

**Illegal (covenants):** “I can’t cut trees down in my subdivision without permission. I don’t know when I can cut because there is a protected bird that breeds here.”

- Presentations to neighborhood association boards or at annual meeting
- Some states have rules that require subdivisions to allow you to cut trees for wildfire mitigation purposes. Recommendations or marking from a forester may be required..
- Partners that can assist with endangered species concerns
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**Rent:** “I rent this property and my landlord won’t do anything about it. I don’t know if I am allowed to do anything about it. Besides, why should I, it’s not my house.”

- Information to share with landlord on Insurance and Increasing Your Market Value
- Presentations to property management companies

### **Overcoming Common Obstacles to Action**

- Take contact information and follow up with owners
- Share incentive program information with owners

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**Small Lot:** “Even if I cleaned up everything on my land, it won’t make a difference unless neighbor Joe does something. Our property is too small to make a difference.”

- “Maybe neighbor Joe will do some work if he understands what needs to be done and can utilize the same resources shared with you today.”
- Neighborhood scale programs or support.
- Focus on what you can do and set a good example. Others are likely to follow.
- Forest health can be improved by fuels mitigation.
- If the house is particularly close to hazardous fuels (including structures), share your concerns with that neighbor. Alternatively, consider adding fire resistant treatments to the affected area of the house.
- Firefighters focus their efforts upon properties that are mitigated for their personal safety and because the probability of saving properly mitigated properties is greatly increased relative to unmitigated areas.

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**Foreclosure:** “The banks won’t do anything unless it affects their liability or the marketability of the home.”

- Contact the owner bank and share your concerns.
  - o Most banks aren’t aware that there is a problem. Make them aware if a foreclosure home they own is in your neighborhood.
  - o Examples of homes that sold following mitigation.
  - o Research on increases in home value following mitigation.
- Don’t assume that because it is a bank, they won’t want to participate in neighborhood grants or cost-share opportunities.

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