



TALKING POINTS

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What is the problem?

2012 was yet another record-setting year for wildfires, burning deserts, mountains, valleys houses and business, almost 10 million acres, leaving behind an extraordinary toll of well over 2652 homes lost. The worst part of this year's wildfire trend is the 36 lives have been lost, both civilian and firefighter. Each year this trend seems to worsen with more and more impacts to communities and homeowners throughout the United States.

Despite the fast-growing number of WUI areas throughout the U.S., study after study shows that rural areas lack proper building, fire and WUI codes. Less than 10% of WUI communities (about 7000 communities) have adopted a WUI code or prepared a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP); less than 2% (about 1200) of WUI communities currently implements wildfire prevention programs. The majority of communities that incorporate such programs have already experienced wildfires. Simply put, most communities are only taking steps after a fire incident occurs, as opposed to preventively working to protect life and property before disaster strikes. Several public awareness programs effectively work to educate communities about ways to prevent wildfires and/or deal with them once they've started. *But there are currently no systemized, widespread initiatives to proactively increase adoption and enforcement of WUI building safety codes, which would serve as a critical element for mitigating the nation's growing WUI fire problem.*

What is this initiative called and who are the partners?

As a result of this escalating crisis, a new joint initiative called **Wildfire Safe, Sound and Code Smart**, will kick off this fall. The primary partners are the National RC&D Councils (RC&D), The International Code Council (ICC), DHS (FEMA) and NIST.

How does this initiative relate with other programs?

Public education and awareness programs (**i.e. Firesafe, Firesmart, Firewise, Firefree, Fireready and Ready, Set, Go**) play a vital role in reducing the risk of WUI fires by educating communities where potential hazards exist, and steps to minimize them. Adoption and enforcement of a WUI code also plays a critical role in WUI fire mitigation, strategically complementing existing WUI fire prevention programs.

A WUI code utilizes science-based understanding to develop proper construction methods to mitigate WUI fires for the built environment, assisting in design recommendations for architects, builders and homeowners, and providing concepts like defensible space and fire-resistant landscaping when building or retrofitting homes. WUI codes also regulate building materials used in home and commercial developments, and enable building inspectors to enforce them. Along with the safety benefits these provisions provide to the public at large, they also reassure homeowners that their homes incorporate regulated, standardized features that can protect them from many of the natural hazards existing in WUI areas.

Wildfire, Safe, Sound and Code Smart, what is it?

The NRC&D Council, International Code Council (ICC), DHS, (FEMA) and NIST, along with other groups are partnered to develop this national program called, **Wildfire Safe, Sound & Code Smart**, which provides a multi-faceted approach to WUI mitigation. The program guides and supports community leaders as they develop and adopt a WUI code, while actively encouraging implementation of existing WUI educational programs. By teaming the NARC&DC's local, grassroots experience and resources along with other key fire, research, insurance the ICC's code adoption and enforcement expertise, the organizations can work together to increase WUI code adoption and public awareness in targeted communities throughout the U.S.

How will it work?

NRC&D Councils will work with ICC and other groups and organizations the will select 75 geographically diverse regions/areas located in 16 states.

How will geographic areas qualify to be a test area?

In order to qualify for this initiative, targeted jurisdictions must already adopt building and fire prevention codes, and utilize planning and code enforcement personnel. They must also demonstrate a committed interest in adopting a WUI code to reduce property damage from wildland fires. Communities that have already implemented a WUI public education and awareness program will receive priority consideration. Communities that meet these criteria are best positioned for success in mitigating WUI fires; **Wildfire Safe, Sound & Code Smart** represents the next natural step in furthering their efforts.

Once the 75 geographic, communities or areas are selected, the RC&D will identify the local RC&D Council within each region and contact them to discuss and confirm their jurisdiction's commitment to program participation. The local RC&D Councils will, in turn, conduct a simple needs assessment to determine their communities' receptiveness to **Wildfire Safe, Sound & Code Smart**.

Once all levels of commitment are secured, each local RC&D Council will develop a team of key members of the council representing a cross section of the community. These teams will be required to attend a variety of organized forums

(i.e., symposia and community meetings) - organized and overseen by local ICC and NARC&DC representatives – to collaboratively develop a strategy for officially adopting a WUI code, with the ultimate goal of local WUI ordinance adoption from the appropriate legislative body.

Will the 75 areas have any financial support?

Local teams will receive support costs for attending meetings and participating in this effort.

What is the overall object of this initiative?

The primary goal of NARC&DC and ICC is increased WUI fire safety, and adoption of the WUI code. Local NARC&DC and ICC representatives will educate participants about WUI code training, compliance and enforcement. They'll also provide teams with the training and resources to effectively address concerns from individual citizens, and better educate the public about ways to prevent wildfires in and around their homes and businesses using the existing WUI preventative programs.

In working toward code adoption, each team will use its jurisdiction's state or local process for mandatory or voluntary WUI code adoption for new home construction. First, they'll establish the exact area they plan to target, such as a single jurisdiction, city, or county, or multiple counties in the geographic area. Several factors will help guide teams in that process, including whether a community utilizes local land use planning guidelines and GIS mapping, has identified WUI area maps, and has a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

Next, teams will establish the performance level or similar guide for a WUI code initiative. Most communities pursue programs that achieve certain requirements for new construction, vegetation management as well as fire suppression. Teams will identify what types of homes will be affected. Most WUI codes include new single-family homes, and major renovations or additions to existing homes. Separate standards for multi-family housing (low-rise and high-rise) and affordable/low-income housing may also be considered.

When a jurisdiction adopts a model code or standard that correlates with its existing codes and standards, it has the freedom to adopt it verbatim, or to tailor it by adding requirements that address a particular situation or need. As each team works to establish a WUI code for the community, they'll be asked to obtain input from affected stakeholders, including elected officials, homebuilders, contractors and trades, green building organizations, fire departments, wildland fire agencies and residents. Municipal building officials, planning staff, and building code enforcement officials should also be consulted. In some cases, basic training may be needed prior to developing legislation to establish the need for the code and develop a basic awareness of provisions with stakeholder 5 groups. After this process is completed, legislation requiring an advanced code will be prepared. Typically, city or county staff prepares a draft ordinance or

legislation establishing the advanced code requirements, which are then implemented by the planning and building departments as a new code, or amendments to existing codes.

A website/webpage will be established to have key project information.

As the initiative begins, a website/webpage will have all the support materials for the project.

What is the final step in this initiative?

The final step is adoption and enforcement of the code. Once completed, a comprehensive plan will be developed that focuses on homeowners, communities, Agency having jurisdiction (AHJ) and builders that includes adequate training and technical assistance, so that they are educated about and prepared to comply with the new code requirements. This may include trade and inspector training programs and certification. (Funding for such programs is always an issue with jurisdictions, but when technical assistance is supported through grant funding, these programs are much easier to incorporate.)

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About NARC&D Council (NARC&DC)

The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program is designed to increase the conservation of natural resources and support the economic development of rural communities throughout the United States. RC&D Councils are the local vehicles that implement the program. Within their respective areas (typically covering 5-8 counties), RC&D Councils have a high degree of independence to carry out activities that will achieve the most important program goals in each RC&D Council area. RC&D Councils provide an excellent way for local residents, community leaders, and grassroots organizations to determine and address the economic and natural resource needs of their communities. Partnerships with other organizations provide one of the keys of the RC&D Program, with RC&D Councils commonly acting as project coordinators and initiators on behalf of their communities.

About International Code Council (ICC)

The International Code Council is a member-focused association dedicated to helping the building safety community and construction industry provide safe and sustainable construction through the development of codes and standards used in the design, build and compliance process. Most U.S. communities and many global markets choose the International Codes. The International Codes, or I-Codes, published by the International Code Council, provide minimum safeguards for people at home, at school and in the workplace. The I-Codes are a complete set of comprehensive, coordinated building safety, fire prevention and energy-efficient codes. Building codes benefit public safety and support the construction industry's need for one set of codes without regional limitations.