

# **NEW REPORT POINTS TO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER SAFETY, RESPONSE STRATEGIES, PUBLIC EDUCATION AND RISK REDUCTION EFFORTS: A summary of highlights**

A first of its kind report based on interviews with local fire departments in the U.S. wildland-urban interface (WUI) examines whether and how local fire departments change and adapt following a major fire event, and identifies critical factors that facilitate or constitute barriers to being better prepared and ready to control and mitigate a wildfire incident in their communities.

According to the report, "[Wildland-Urban Interface: Fire Department Wildfire Preparedness and Readiness Capabilities](#)," recommendations for safety improvements point to WUI firefighting equipment, firefighting training, the health and fitness of firefighters, and more.

The increasing frequency and intensity of wildland and WUI fires have become a significant concern in many parts of the U.S. and around the world. The report, which consists of interviews with fire officials who have experienced a major wildfire within the last five years, takes a comprehensive look at wildland firefighting nationwide.

The majority of fire officials interviewed said that experiencing a large wildfire event has increased their awareness of the need for additional wildland firefighting training and stricter fitness requirements. However, even when senior officers recognize these needs, they still face obstacles including availability of resources and funding, organizational structure and culture, and personnel resistance.

## **The following are key highlights from the report:**

- **WUI/Wildland Firefighting Equipment:** Budgetary constraints are the leading barrier to access to WUI-specific apparatus and tools, including the latest upgrades. Lack of funds also prohibits the purchase of full, up-to-date wildland personal protection equipment (PPE) assembles for every wildland firefighter.
- **Firefighter Training:** Urban, rural and volunteer fire departments increasingly co-manage fire in the WUI, however, there is a need to transition from traditional (structural) training practices to wildland fire training. Career firefighters tend to receive more wildland training than volunteers, including refresher courses and advanced wildland certifications.
- **Firefighter Health and Fitness:** Firefighter fitness levels are not always adequate for the rigors of WUI fire events. While the pack test, health screenings and fitness programs are typically used to make determinations about whether firefighters can work on wildland fires, standard requirements for health and fitness vary by jurisdiction and among career versus volunteer firefighters.

## **Additional focal points of the study include:**

- **Political Support for Wildfire Mitigation Projects:** Getting and maintaining the necessary community interest and political support for risk reduction projects are often difficult. Local officials are often not familiar with how these projects can reduce wildfire risk and damages, nor are they aware of the time, resources and coordination required for them.
- **Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Activities:** Particularly among urban firefighters, wildfire threat and risk reduction efforts may not be considered critically important. Greater attention is often paid toward structural firefighting and suppression tactics, due in part to the lack of threat awareness as well as the lack of interest in, and active resistance to, wildfire prevention and mitigation activities.
- **Effective Wildfire Response Strategies:** The most frequently mentioned effective approach or strategy to wildfire response is an aggressive and quick initial response and call for resources when conditions are ripe for a fire to grow larger or when future conditions are uncertain. However, the ability to respond with a combination of tactics and resources depends on budgets and training – both of which are often limited.
- **Fire Departments and Wildfire Public Education and Outreach:** Departments view public education and outreach as important activities when partnering with communities to raise more awareness around preparedness and risk reduction projects that can make a difference when it comes time to fight a fire. Budgetary concerns and resources, however, play a large role in how much a department is actually able to accomplish.



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## **Key statistics from the report include:**

- Number of brush, grass, and forest fires local departments respond to each year: 334,200
- 30% of departments surveyed don't have a wildfire pre-attack plan
- 37% of departments surveyed don't have a firefighter fitness program
- 54% of departments surveyed who have fitness programs don't use the U.S. Forest Service pack test, a test of physical fitness for wildland firefighters
- 68% of departments surveyed have firefighters who use chainsaws who aren't certified fallers
- 21% of departments surveyed have firefighters who use chainsaws without any of the appropriate PPE

The study is a final phase of a two-part report. [The Phase One study](#) was published in 2015.

The data collected for this study helps inform research groups such as the [Fire Protection Research Foundation](#) and benefits NFPA's technical committees that work on standards related to wildfire including [NFPA 1901, Standard for Automotive Fire Apparatus](#); [NFPA 1906, Standard for Wildland Fire Apparatus](#); [NFPA 1051 Standard for Wildland Firefighter Professional Qualifications](#); and [NFPA 1142, Standard for Wildland Fire Management](#).

Get a [detailed look at the final report](#) including all of the survey questions and responses, and excerpts from interviews on NFPA's website. Additional information on firefighter safety in the WUI can be found in NFPA's latest "[Fourth Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service](#)" report.



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