

Executive Summary – Engaging Youth in Reducing Wildfire Risk Report

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Currently, a nationwide wildland fire education program that focuses exclusively on changing youth behaviors and attitudes as they relate to prevention, preparedness and mitigation actions does not exist. Estimates indicate that more than 8.8 million students in grades six through twelve could benefit from learning how to reduce the wildfire risk at their home and in their communities; but scant attention has been given to this group regarding wildfire preparedness and risk reduction. This demographic has the potential to be a valuable conduit in getting mitigation information into the home and has the ability to initiate productive family conversations on the topic with corresponding mitigation actions.

Within the extremely limited amount of materials, curricula and programs available for middle and high school students to learn about wildfire and how to reduce the risk; most are packaged within an environmental education program (primarily as a subtopic) without any information on why and how homes are lost, the relationship between embers and the home ignition zone, and how to reduce the risk.

Research has identified gaps in what is currently being offered to youth:

- The majority of programs for older children leave out personal and home safety and **fail to address the science of home ignition**
- The **topic of wildfire is wrapped into other curriculum**, often appearing as a subtopic to a larger theme
- Programs created by agencies and brought into schools are **very difficult to fund, sustain and replicate**
- Programs do not appear to **address the issue of children's needs when wildfire has impacted their homes or communities**

With a dearth of published literature on what youth want and need regarding wildfire safety information, Firewise Program staff recently engaged teens and their parents through an interactive conversation on the topic at six workshops in communities throughout Colorado and Texas that were recently impacted by wildfire. The workshops engaged participants in a focused conversation about wildland fire safety, Firewise concepts, preferred program formats and the most desirable delivery channels. Conversations from the workshops provided valuable input on the types of wildfire information and resources that youth want and need. The workshops combined with both an extensive literature search and questionnaire to teachers produced a strong set of indicators about the types of programs, materials, and distribution strategies that will provide the most efficient and effective programs for educating youth on the topic in wildland/urban interface areas.

A format that actively engages youth in learning how to reduce their community's wildfire risk using Firewise principles in a unique and innovative approach, that appeals to the target group in an easily available no cost format, would provide significant benefits to individuals, neighborhoods, and entire communities.

Wildfire education components designed specifically for a youth demographic has the potential to provide life-long knowledge about the importance of mitigation and preparedness to both present and future wildland/urban interface land and homeowners; and would move forward the goal of reducing the staggering losses and long-term recovery impacts caused by wildfires.