

Community Mitigation Assistance Team

National Pilot Highlights
August 2015



"These folks fill a niche that fire information & liaison officers don't typically have in their respective involvement with the communities. I agree with the need to have the folks come in pre-season to work directly with affected fire district/department personnel for the benefit of homeowners that are potentially affected."

*Clay Templin, U. S. Forest Service
Incident Commander, SWA IMT 1*



Team Members

Pam Leschak, USFS, S&PF FAM

Jonathan Bruno, Coalition for the Upper South Platte

Jeremy Taylor, Colorado Springs Fire Department Wildfire Mitigation Division

Michelle Medley-Daniel, Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

Katie Lighthall, Western Regional Cohesive Strategy

Will May, International Association of Fire Chiefs

Bob Kowalski, Nationwide Insurance

Community Hosts

Annie Schmidt and Hilary Lundgren, Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition

Partners

Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
Southwest Area Incident Management Team 1

Chelan County Fire District 3

Lake Wenatchee Fire and Rescue

Ryan Anderson, WA Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

Support

Brenda O'Connor, Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety

Shawn Stokes, International Association of Fire Chiefs

Brett Holt, FEMA

Cindy Palmer, FEMA

Executive Summary

Scores of communities nationwide experience the impacts of wildfire every year; thousands of residents evacuate; infrastructure is threatened; many communities, especially those dependent on tourism or natural resources, are economically devastated; and wildfire response costs billions.

But the wildfire itself presents a narrow window of opportunity to support, enhance, and enable community mitigation education and fire adapted communities actions. That window of opportunity, while smoke is in the air, is a priceless teachable moment when community members experience the immediate importance of mitigation and are ready, willing, and able to take action on both an individual and community level.

Existing jurisdictions (the incident management team and Forest) cannot effectively address just-in-time mitigation assistance because wildfire response is the priority. Liaison officers, structure protection groups, and public information officers, similarly, are not available or equipped to work collaboratively with local communities to enable mitigation actions, increase local sustainable capacity, and build relationships.

A pilot community mitigation assistance team (C-MAT) deployed in August 2015 to take advantage of the teachable moment in targeted communities impacted by the Chelan Complex. The 7-person team worked with the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, the Southwest Area Incident Management Team, and local partners, including the Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition, to target high risk communities with heightened need and interest in wildfire mitigation. The team focused on mitigation education and building local capacity while simultaneously providing benefits to the IMT and Forest through just-in-time mitigation support.



Pilot Community Mitigation Assistance Team

Back row, left to right: Will May, International Association of Fire Chiefs; Jeremy Taylor, Colorado Springs Fire Department; Jonathan Bruno, Coalition for the Upper South Platte; Michelle Medley-Daniel, Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network. *Front row, left to right:* Bob Kowalski, Nationwide Insurance; Katie Lighthall, Western Regional Cohesive Strategy; Pam Leschak, USFS and S&PF FAM.

Chelan Complex Pilot

Key information about the pilot deployment to communities near the Chelan Complex in north-central Washington in 2015:

The Team-in addition to the lead, the team included:

- Two wildland urban interface mitigation specialists with extensive knowledge and experience working with communities, developing sustainable mitigation partnerships, teaching fire adaptation practices (including GIS, and computer based home assessments), developing community wildfire protection plans, and dealing with public concerns regarding mitigation.
- Subject matter experts on homeowners insurance, fire department training and development, and community networking/partnership building.

The team also reached out for additional support from Forest Service partners: International Association of Fire Chiefs, Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, The Nature Conservancy, Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), The Watershed Center, and U.S. Fire Administration.

The Community and Enabling Conditions

The team targeted the communities of Wenatchee, Lake Wenatchee, Plain, and Ponderosa based on:

- Proximity to the Wolverine incident but not under active evacuation orders
- Clear potential threat from the fire, with corresponding community anxiety and desire for action
- Supportive local Fire Chiefs, Forest, and IMT
- Existing backlog of home assessments and landowner interest
- Existing and engaged local network and motivated local champions
- Previous investment in mitigation activities
- Proximity to existing Fire Adapted Community efforts (Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition) for extended community context, support, background awareness of the need to adapt to wildfire, as well as the ability to recognize that the Lake Wenatchee area was “ripe” for fire adaptation efforts
- Existence of Washington Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network for background support.

Work was strategic (teaching home assessment skills, guidance on adaptation practices, value of preparation, and developing and enhancing local collaboratives/networks for sustained engagement) and not tactical (cutting trees, removing brush, cleaning gutters).



"Many times people whose homes are suddenly in the path of an oncoming wildfire find they don't know what sort of mitigation work needs to be done prior to the fire arriving on their property. Deploying a community mitigation assistance team of trained individuals, can not only help these property owners, but take some of the burden of finding trained people to interface with owners off the incident management team."

*Steve Gage, Assistant Director – Operations
U.S. Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management*

Results during the 14-day assignment:

- the team met with over 200 people in the targeted communities
- trained 100 people to perform home assessments using I-Auditor (Lake Wenatchee Fire Dept, Lake Wenatchee Fire Auxiliary, Chelan County Fire District 1 & 3, City of Leavenworth Staff, Chelan County Staff, and residents of focus area communities)
- enrolled 40 people in the neighborhood ambassadors program (see the full report)
- customized the home assessment tool and support package
- established a mechanism to capture assessment data for use by local FDs
- created a virtual workspace to connect FDs and citizens with others around the state working on fire adaptation to sustain and support the mitigation effort
- provided the City of Leavenworth and Chelan County WUI code development information and connected them with technical assistance
- developed a follow-up mechanism to track accomplishment over time
- developed and distributed after-incident information regarding floods and national flood insurance
- provided guidance on funding sources for pre- and post-incident mitigation and recovery

What Can C-MATs Do?

In addition to the activities piloted during the Chelan Complex, the team identified other opportunities of value to communities, the Forest/ Ranger District, and the IMT during an incident. Additional items may result as pilot efforts uncover more opportunities for lasting mitigation success. The following is a basic menu of team services.

BEFORE THE FIRE

A team ordered before wildfire season can focus on community mitigation outreach, education, and capacity building in targeted high-risk WUI communities.

- Building community engagement in fire adaptation mitigation methods
- Home assessment training, implementation, and tracking
- Building a neighborhood ambassador program
- Assisting Forest/community/local government efforts to form fire adaptation collaboratives
- CWPP review and assistance
- Fire department wildfire mitigation training and assistance
- General wildfire preparation (mitigation, evacuation preparation, resources) and communicating response limitations and importance of individual responsibility

DURING THE FIRE

A team ordered during a wildfire incident can take advantage of the teachable moment when interest and willingness to act is high.

- Just-in-time home assessments in communities at imminent risk (5-14 days) and in communities beyond the imminent threat window
- Train-the-trainer structure assessment training for organizations (fire departments, civic groups, municipal and county groups); for individuals (neighborhoods, communities); and for Forest/Ranger District or other personnel who are engaged in helping reduce local wildfire risk
- Rapid Community Fire Adaptation Assessment by conducting an overview of community mitigation actions, plans, gaps, strategies, and opportunities resulting in a mitigation situation report and outlines/priorities next steps.
- Catalyze community-scale adaptation by identifying fledgling fire adaptation focus areas and use existing defensible space efforts as springboards to move the community beyond the residential scope; help residents develop a community scale strategy and assist in convening relevant stakeholders.
- Develop and deploy a neighborhood ambassador program: identify and enroll local thought leaders to carry the fire adaptation message to their communities; aggregate their accomplishments, and form a local network of support. (See Neighborhood Ambassador in full report).
- Initiate a local mitigation collaborative or support an existing one by using national team status, partnerships, connections, and urgency to bring additional partners to the table and improving group capacity.
- Advise communities on adoption of WUI codes and ordinances. Examples: presentations to City or County officials (including building inspectors, Councils, planning staff), sharing examples of successfully adopted codes, and connecting personnel to others around the country who have experience with WUI codes. These activities lay the foundation for elected official engagement in fire adaption.

"It's time to acknowledge that we might be facing a challenge here in the entire Chiwawa, Lake Wenatchee, Plain and Ponderosa area. We do have an advantage, however, that other areas that suffered greatly last year and this year did not have - we have time to prepare."

Fire Chief Mick Lamar, Lake Wenatchee Fire & Rescue



AFTER THE FIRE

- Conduct Rapid Community Fire Adaptation Assessment: an overview of community mitigation actions, plans, gaps, strategies, and opportunities resulting in a mitigation situation report and outlines/priorities next steps.
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This concept has been piloted twice on the national level and dozens of times on the state level. The national team seeks several more pilot opportunities to further the concept.

Ordering a C-MAT

Order a C-MAT before an incident if:

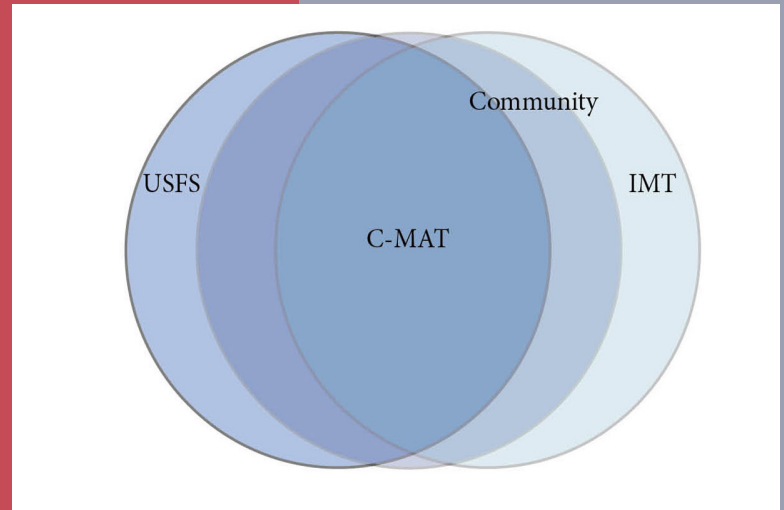
- The Forest/Ranger District or community anticipate wildfire risk during the coming season

Order a C-MAT during an incident if:

- The local forest cannot provide mitigation outreach to the local community to take advantage of the teachable moment
- The wildfire is expected to threaten structures within 7-14 days
- Structure protection is ordered or being used
- There is need for pre-fire mitigation assistance in highest risk (first tier) communities at imminent threat
- There is need for pre-fire mitigation assistance in high risk (second tier) communities at less threat
- Pre-fire mitigation training and assistance could help the community and the Forest
- Incident Management Team needs regarding fire adaptation practices, community engagement, and coalition building can't be met with existing capacity or resources
- Community mitigation/fire adaptation opportunities during the incident would benefit the IMT, Forest and local community.

Order a C-MAT after an incident if there is:

- Continued need for mitigation assistance
- An opportunity to build or strengthen local capacity for mitigation education or actions
- Need to support local organizations in developing mitigation plans or strategies
- Opportunity to strengthen mitigation partnerships, coalitions, or networks



“During a fire, more people take an interest in playing some role. The C-MAT can help focus that energy in the right direction and empower people to take individual responsibility to mitigate.”

Ryan Anderson, Executive Director, WA Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network


Teams are scalable based on the needs of the ordering entity. At a minimum, a C-MAT will consist of a lead, a support person, one PIO, 2-8 WUI specialists (depending on mission scope) and 1-3 trainees.

Enabling Conditions

- _____ Identifiable need with viable solutions
- _____ Region, Forest, District or IMT is able to support team
- _____ Region, Forest, District, IMT and community provide point of contact for local support
- _____ There is pre-existing relationship with the community to build on
- _____ Community has invested in mitigation
- _____ Available charge code (p-code, ABC misc, NIFC Large Fire Support code, or Preparedness)
- _____ Delegation of authority: an identifiable need and viable solutions to address the need is agreed upon between ordering authority, and team lead and community host and is within mitigation scope
- _____ Ordering authority (IMT or Forest) provides team support (work location, supplies, internet access, etc) in target community




"Wildfires are teachable moments. The local community is focused and paying attention in a way that no ad campaign can duplicate."
Jim Gumm, District Ranger, U.S. Forest Service



“Communities at risk are particularly interested in mitigation when the threat becomes real to them – during an incident. It makes sense to provide mitigation guidance when people are ready to act. The cost of a team is far outweighed by the many benefits it provides to the community, the Forest, and the Incident Management Team.”

*Pam Leschak, National WUI Program Manager, U.S. Forest Service,
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