

Talking Points for Wildfires

Talking points and message maps for local health professionals

If you are approached by the media regarding a reported wildfire-related fatality in your jurisdiction, the following talking points may be used. Start with message A1 or A2, then follow the instructions within that box.

A1

We were notified by the medical examiner/coroner about a fatality possibly due to a wildfire. Our condolences go out to the family.

Go to message B1 or B2.

A2

We have not been notified of any recent fatalities linked to wildfires.

Go to message C.

B1

Out of respect for the family, we are unable to share any details.

Go to message C.

B2

On [insert date], a [gender] ["____ years old" or "between the ages of ____ and ____"] died during the storm.

Go to message C.

C

Burns can be rapid and fatal. People should remain safe by:

- a. Listening to local authorities and evacuating when ordered.
- b. Burning debris safely outside by limiting your burn pile to a six foot by six foot area.
- c. Preparing homes and landscapes using fire prevention techniques.

For more information, visit [insert relevant website].

MESSAGE MAPS ABOUT WILDFIRE-RELATED SAFETY

Message mapping is one of the most important risk communication tools that public health agencies can employ. The goal of a message map is to convey important information in a concise and easy-to-understand fashion.



General Guidelines for Completing a Message Map

- Stick to three key messages or one key message with three parts for each underlying concern or specific question.
- Keep key messages brief. The reader should ideally spend less than 10 seconds per line.
- Develop messages that are easily understood by the target audience. (For communications with the general public, use a 6th to 8th grade readability level.)
- Place messages within a message set. The most important messages should occupy the first and last positions.
- Develop key messages that cite credible third parties.
- Use graphics and other visual aids to enhance key messages.
- Keep a positive tone. Messages should be solution-oriented and constructive. Try to balance negative messages with positive ones.
- Avoid unnecessary use of “absolute” words such as no, not, never, nothing, and none.⁵

The following is a message map that could be used when addressing the general public regarding wildfire-related safety.

Main Message

“Since [March/April/May/June/July, etc.], there has/have been ___ wildfire fatalities in Wisconsin. To help you and your loved ones stay safe during this wildfire season...”

Key Messages <i>Three key messages</i>	Supporting Information <i>Three pieces of supporting information for each key message</i>
Message 1 Prepare your home and landscaping with fire prevention in mind.	Supporting Info 1 Fuel breaks between landscaping and home can prevent the spread of wildfires. Supporting Info 2 Using fire-resistant materials may help your home survive a wildfire. Supporting Info 3 Weekend activities, like pruning trees and mowing the lawn, can aid in wildfire prevention.
Message 2 Be careful while burning debris and follow the directions of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.	Supporting Info 1 Call 1-888-WIS-Burn to check on daily burning restrictions. Supporting Info 2 Never burn on a windy day, as embers and sparks may ignite surrounding vegetation and start a wildfire. Supporting Info 3 Ninety percent of wildfires are caused by human activity. ⁷
Message 3 Prepare for evacuation and leave when local authorities advise.	Supporting Info 1 Burns from wildfires can be life threatening. Supporting Info 2 Preparedness efforts, including an emergency plan and kit, will save you time during an emergency. Supporting Info 3 Wildfire conditions can change rapidly. Leaving early can save lives.

