Flood After Fire Toolkit
December 2017

Image credit: DM Molina Terrén
User Guide

**WHAT:** In the following slides you will find templates, tips, and materials to share in your community or region when there is a high risk for flooding after wildfires.

**WHO:** Stakeholders are encouraged to use the materials directly to raise awareness about the risk of flooding after wildfires, and to share the materials with other local community organizations and relevant groups to raise awareness among their networks.

**WHERE:** All materials can be customized for your community or region. Yellow highlighted areas indicate language that is meant to be modified.

**WHY:** All materials have a clear “call to action” to help residents understand their risk and encourage property owners and renters to prepare for flooding after wildfires. One of the best ways to prepare is to purchase or renew flood insurance.
HOW: This toolkit includes a range of materials—from quick, easy actions to more advanced communications strategies. All of the templates, tools, and suggestions can be used with limited communications experience.

Before using this toolkit, determine the scope and strategy of your flood after fire campaign. Consider:

• Who in my community is most at risk of flooding after a wildfire?
• How do residents get their information? What sources, organizations, or individuals do they trust?
• What social media channels do I have access to?
• Do I have any connections with local media?
• Are there relevant organizations that could help spread the word?
In this toolkit you’ll find:

1. Key Messages
2. Communications Materials and Tips
   • Social and Digital Media
   • Print Materials
   • Press Outreach
3. Appendix
Key Messages
Key Messages

The key messages are used throughout the toolkit materials. In your efforts to raise awareness about the risk of flooding after wildfires, include the key messages in all communications.

- **WARNING:** Flooding after a wildfire is a one-two punch. Following a wildfire, the terrain is dramatically altered. The ground can no longer absorb water, so even light rain can lead to devastating flash flooding and mudflows.

- **RISK:** Even if your home wasn’t directly impacted by a wildfire, you are at increased risk for flooding. After a wildfire, all surrounding and impacted areas are at risk for flooding for up to several years.

- **PROTECT:** Protect the life you’ve built. You’ve made it through one disaster, now the best way to protect your property from flooding after fire is to purchase flood insurance.

- **MISCONCEPTION:** Most homeowners insurance does not cover flooding. Just an inch of water in an average-sized home can cause more than $25,000 in damage.
Communications
Materials & Tips
**Communications Materials**

**SOCIAL & DIGITAL MEDIA**

Recommended use:
- Post on your social media channels
- Share with local organizations, news media, and influencers for them to share on their social media channels

**PRINT MATERIALS**

Recommended use:
- Print copies to have on-hand at events and in your office
- Distribute to local organizations
- Include in press release pitch email
- Add to your website

**PRESS OUTREACH**

Recommended use:
- Identify prominent community news media including local print, radio, or TV outlets
- Add information tailored to your specific community or region
- Share with reporters you’ve worked with during wildfire season

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*full versions of the communications materials can be found in the provided zip folder*
The average American spends more than four hours a day online. To reach people quickly and easily, post on Facebook and Twitter regularly, up to several times per day. Schedule your posts during moments of high online traffic, often during morning commutes or after dinner. You should feel comfortable sharing the same post repeatedly over a period of several days or weeks. Twitter estimates that less than 5% of your audience will view any single tweet, so repetition ensures higher reach.

You can also update your website’s homepage or e-newsletters to include an “alert” about the heightened risk of flooding after wildfire.

We’ve created the website fema.gov/flood-after-fire and its Spanish counterpart fema.gov/es/flood-after-fire to direct people to a single page that can serve as a “one stop shop” for anyone looking for more information.
Social and Digital Media

Facebook

A. Know your risk: If your home was recently affected by a wildfire, you are at risk of flash flooding and mudflows. Find out what you can do: fema.gov/flood-after-fire

B. [County or Community Name]: Flood risk is significantly higher up to several years after a large-scale wildfire event. Here’s what you can do to protect the life you’ve built: fema.gov/flood-after-fire #FloodSmart

C. FACT: If you live in an area recently affected by wildfires, you are at risk of flooding, the most costly natural disaster. Most homeowners insurance does not cover floods from natural disasters. Make sure your home is protected: fema.gov/flood-after-fire

D. [County or Community Name]: If you’re living in an area that has experienced a wildfire you are at high risk of flash flooding and mudflows. Do you have flood insurance? Be prepared: fema.gov/flood-after-fire
Social and Digital Media

Facebook

Know your risk: If your home was recently affected by a wildfire, you are at risk of flash flooding and mudflows. Find out what you can do: fema.gov/flood-after-fire

Flood After Fire
Know the risks of wildfires.

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
**Social and Digital Media**

**Twitter**

A. Know your risk: If your home was recently affected by a wildfire, you are at risk of #flashflooding and mudflows. Find out what you can do: fema.gov/flood-after-fire #CaliforniaFires #SonomaStrong

B. [County or Community Name]: Flood risk is significantly higher up to several years after a large-scale wildfire event. Protect the life you’ve built: fema.gov/flood-after-fire #CaliforniaFires #SonomaStrong

C. FACT: If you live in an area recently affected by wildfires, you are at risk of flooding. Most homeowners insurance does not cover flooding. Make sure your home is protected: fema.gov/flood-after-fire #CaliforniaFires #SonomaStrong

D. [County or Community Name]: If you’re living in an area that has experienced a wildfire you are at high risk of #flashflooding and mudflows. Do you have flood insurance? Be prepared: fema.gov/flood-after-fire #CaliforniaFires #SonomaStrong
Social and Digital Media

Twitter

FEMA @fema

Know your risk: If your home was recently affected by a wildfire, you are at risk of #flashflooding and mudflows. Find out what you can do: fema.gov/flood-after-fire #CaliforniaFires #SonomaStrong
In a prominent location on your website, display the following web copy. You can modify the copy to run as an “alert” banner along the top of your website or in an email newsletter.

**HEADER:** FEMA Advisory: Flooding After Fire

**BODY:** FEMA has issued a warning to all [Insert Region or County] residents alerting of the increased risk of flash flooding and mudflows following this historic wildfire season. We urge residents to protect themselves by planning evacuation routes, collecting supplies, and purchasing flood insurance today. To learn more, visit fema.gov/flood-after-fire.
FEMA has issued a warning to Northern California residents that they're at increased risk of flash flooding and mudflows following the historic wildfire season. Residents are urged to protect themselves by purchasing flood insurance today. To learn more, visit fema.gov/flood-after-fire.
Another way to raise awareness is to share printed and digital materials with other organizations within your community.

For instance, a neighborhood safety organization may have a meeting coming up. You can email the following resources for them to print and hand out at the meeting. Or, you could deliver printed copies to a local business to hand out to customers. Many reporters also find factsheets and infographics helpful as they develop stories for the local news.
Flood After Fire: The Risk

Floods are the most common and costly natural hazard in the nation. Whether caused by heavy rain, thunderstorms, or the tropical storms, the results of flooding can be devastating. While some floods develop over time, flash floods—particularly common after wildfires—can occur within minutes after the onset of a rainstorm. Even areas that are not traditionally flood-prone are at risk, due to changes to the landscape caused by fire. Residents need to protect their homes and assets with flood insurance now—before a weather event occurs and it's too late.

Residents and business owners are urged to purchase flood insurance now to guarantee financial protection from flooding. There typically is a 30-day waiting period before flood insurance takes effect. But the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012 allows for an exception to the waiting period in certain cases where property is affected by flooding on burned Federal land that is a result of, or is exacerbated by, post-wildfire conditions.

WILDFIRES
Large-scale wildfires dramatically alter the terrain and ground conditions. Normally, vegetation absorbs rainfall, reducing runoff. However, wildfires leave the ground charred, barren, and unable to absorb water, creating conditions ripe for flash flooding and mudflow. Flood risk remains significantly higher until vegetation is restored—up to 5 years after a wildfire. Flooding after fire is often more severe, as debris and ash left from the fire can form mudflows. As rainwater moves across charred and denuded landscapes, it can create dangerous mudflows that can cause substantial damage.
Print Materials
Infographic

FLOOD AFTER FIRE

Did you know that wildfires dramatically alter the terrain and increase the risk of floods?

Reduce your risk: The time to buy flood insurance is now.

Contact your local insurance agent for more information on the National Flood Insurance Program at www.fema.gov/national-flood-insurance-program.

Degree of Land Slope
Higher degrees of land slope speed up water flow and increase flood risk.

Flash Floods
Increase rainfall can flood low-lying areas in less than six hours. Flash floods roll boulders, tear out trees and destroy buildings and bridges.

Mudflows
 Rivers of mud and flowing mud are caused by a combination of brush less and subsequent heavy rains. Rapid snowmelt can also trigger mudflows.

And as a result, properties located below or downstream of the burn areas are at an increased risk for flooding.
Press Outreach

To increase visibility of the risk for flooding after wildfire, consider reaching out to your local media to help spread the word. Local newspapers, blogs, TV, and radio stations are often looking for important community stories, and can help you reach audiences outside of your usual communications channels.

Once you’ve identified local media outlets, you’ll want to customize the provided press release and email template to contact reporters, asking them to report on flooding after wildfire risk.

Even if reporters are not able to write about this topic, reaching out is an opportunity to build and strengthen relationships with the media, which can help you “earn” coverage in the future.
Press Outreach

Choosing a Local Media Outlet

**Print Media:** Your local print media may include a main daily paper, local weekly paper, and smaller neighborhood publications. Many of these outlets also post stories on their website and on social media. Look for reporters who have covered previous wildfires, natural disasters, PSAs, or breaking news. Offer reporters interviews with Emergency Managers, property owners who’ve purchased flood insurance, or photos of local flooding after fire to help them build their story.

**Radio:** In addition to reaching out to radio news reporters to invite them to cover the risk of flood after fire, you may consider reaching out to music stations or popular morning shows. For instance, a local R&B or pop station may be willing to run a PSA or interview a community official between songs without having a formal paid partnership.

**Television:** Contact local news stations by finding their news desk contact information on their website (usually on the contact page under “news tips”). TV producers are most concerned with visuals, so you can help by introducing them to community members and Emergency Managers to interview, offering to share any video footage or photos, along with the infographic and social media graphic provided in this toolkit.

**Constituency Media:** Media outlets that are targeted to local communities are an effective way to reach demographic groups, such as Spanish-speakers or readers with a specific interest like neighborhood news and safety. These outlets can be print, online, radio, or TV. Although they usually have very small staffs and it may take longer to connect with them, they are often looking for relevant local stories.
Press Outreach

News Release

[Insert Organization Name] Warns: [Insert Region] at Increased Risk of Flooding Following Historic Wildfire Season

[Insert Organizations Name] urges residents to protect their home, business, property with flood insurance as rainy season approaches.

[City, State] – As [insert region/city] recovers from the recent devastation caused by wildfires, [insert local organization name] warns residents living in and surrounding wildfire areas about the high risk of flash flooding and mudflows, and urging them to protect their home, business, or property with flood insurance.

Wildfires result in a loss of vegetation and leave the ground charred and unable to absorb water. This creates conditions for flooding. Even areas that are not traditionally flood-prone are at risk of flooding for up to several years after a wildfire.

"Include a quote from a local staff or community member about the risk of flood after fire," said [insert name], the [Insert title] of [insert community organization].

Floods are the most common and expensive natural disaster in the U.S. Just an inch of water in averaged-size home can cause more than $25,000 in damage. Most homeowners and renters insurance policies do not cover flood damage. Flood insurance is a separate policy that protects homes and belongings.
Press Outreach

Contacting Reporters

After customizing the press release, share it with reporters. Your organization may already have a media list with the names and contact information for local reporters, TV producers, or editors. If you don’t have a media list, you can easily find contact information online, often under the “contact” or “about” sections of a news organization’s website.
Dear [Reporter Name] – I hope this email finds you well.

I’m the [Insert title] for [insert region]. [Insert sentence to personalize: “Thanks so much for your work to raise awareness after the devastating recent wildfires.”]

With the rainy season coming up, we want to bring attention to [Insert region] high risk for flooding after fire. Because the wildfires have changed the terrain, all residents who live in and around areas impacted by wildfires are now at a heightened risk for flash flooding and mudflows. We’re working to get the word out and make sure all [Insert City] residents are prepared for flooding. Will you help us by writing a story covering this topic?

Attached please find a press release with more information about how the community can take action. I’m also happy to put you in contact with representatives from [other local community organization] who can speak to the flood risk.

Hope to hear from you soon,
[Insert Name & email signature]
Press Outreach
Interview Tips and Tricks

**Be prepared.** Do your research on the reporter and their previous coverage. Know in advance what the format of the interview is and what questions to expect.

**Be strategic.** Determine your objective, and answer every question within that objective. Bridge your response to the questions asked with the answers you’ve planned in advance.

**Be snappy.** Only a few sentences from your interview will make it into the story, so everything you say should restate or reinforce your message. Keep responses 15-30 seconds long.

**Be human.** Reporters aren’t your audience; their readers or viewers are. Answer questions as if you’re speaking directly to your target audience, and use personal anecdotes or analogies

**Be a partner.** Be helpful, responsive and respectful of the reporter’s deadlines. Help them find other people willing to speak on the record.

**Don’t patronize.** Don’t mistake a PR opportunity for advertising. Reporters are there to write news for their readers, not to run a free ad for your issue or organization.

**Don’t go into the weeds.** Know what level of detail to provide a reporter. Don’t try to educate the reporter about every single issue; it leads to confusion, distracts from your core messaging and can back you into a corner.

**Don’t speak in jargon.** Adjust your vocabulary to the technical level of the interviewers and their readers or viewers. If you use unfamiliar terms, you’ll decrease the chances of an accurate story.
Appendix

1_Flood After Fire_Toolkit.pdf
2a_Flood After Fire_Social Media Copy.doc
2b_Flood After Fire_Social Media Image.png
3_Flood After Fire_Fact Sheet.doc
4_Flood After Fire_Infographic.pdf
5_Flood After Fire_Press Release Template.doc
6_Flood After Fire_Reporter Email Template.doc