

Community Wildfire Protection Plan

July 2021

David Lentzner works for Multnomah County Emergency Management in the Planning Division, and is currently coordinating an update to the [Multnomah County Community Wildfire Protection Plan](#) (CWPP).

Q: What's the Plan, and why is it being updated now? Can you provide an overview and/or the intent of this Plan?

A: The CWPP is designed to bring experts together to identify strategies that will reduce the impact of future wildfires and wildfire smoke events. Multnomah County has a current CWPP that was passed in 2011. Since then, we've had major fires in the area, including the 2017 Eagle Creek Fire, and have experienced increasingly long fire seasons with wildfire smoke in the air. We wanted to update the plan to include smoke impacts, and to reflect the greater concern that exists now across nearly the entire county about wildfire risk. We also wanted to make sure that our plan was thinking about everyone in the community, who may be impacted by smoke or fire events differently.

Q: How is Multnomah County using lessons learned from recent years to update this Plan?

A: Recent experiences across the West have provided the urgency to this plan update. We have been reminded by western fires how challenging it is to alert the public of dangers and plan evacuations, with potentially devastating consequences. Last year's Oregon fire season had a severe wind event that fanned so many fires at the same time that it severely taxed our ability as a state to respond effectively. There are measurable consequences from longer and hotter fire seasons and continued growth and development in high-risk fire areas. It feels like we are learning lessons every year from fire and smoke events, so we are probably more trying to prioritize all the things we already know and trying to anticipate what we haven't yet seen that might happen in a catastrophic fire event.

Q: Discuss the workgroups engaged with this project.

A: CWPP's were designed for Fire Districts to use as a collaborative strategy guide, especially for reducing wildfire fuels and making structures more resilient to fire. We have had participation in this plan from every Fire District with service area in Multnomah County - and we have also had participation from natural resource agencies, public utilities, soil and water conservation districts, homeless services agencies, land use planning and building development agencies, and many more. On the wildfire smoke side, the plan has been supported by human services, environmental health and facilities management agencies. Both parts have also been supported by relevant State and Federal agencies.

Q: What has the experience been like coordinating meetings and updates remotely rather than in person?

A: In some ways, it has been an improvement. Our past meeting plans required people to travel all across the County for meetings and made logistics complicated. I think we have learned that a lot of meetings can be conducted online in the future and preserve people's time. On the other

hand, it has been challenging to do every meeting online. We have missed the opportunity for participants to meet in person, have more informal opportunities to coordinate, and have more interactive meeting strategies. Meetings have also been shorter, because of the fatigue people get looking at a screen for a long time. We have tried to incorporate different ways to engage participants, but there are limits in what can be done on online platforms.

Q: Has there been anything new or surprising to you as you've worked on this Plan?

A: I don't know that it's surprising, but I have been really impressed with the amount of enthusiasm and support this plan has gotten from our governmental and power utility partners. We can see each summer that fire and smoke have become two of the most pressing natural hazard issues we face, and there is recognition that we need to take cooperative action before we see even more severe effects.

Q: What has been your personal experience with wildfire and how has that, along with the development of this Plan, influenced your family's preparedness efforts?

A: I am from Northern California, and the Oakland Hills Firestorm in 1991 is a personal way for me to connect to Multnomah County's risk. We had family friends who lost their homes, but going back and reading about that fire now, I can see similarities with parts of Multnomah County. The Oakland fire is believed to have started from a single ember left over from a grass fire that ignited in high-wind conditions the next day. The neighborhoods that burned were not dissimilar from communities on our ridges and buttes - they didn't back up to a huge National Forest full of giant trees, there was just a mix of some woodland reserves and large residential lots with landscaping and trees. People here may not have thought that Multnomah County could have those kinds of weather conditions, but the fire seasons are getting longer every year, and unusual wind events, like on Labor Day last year, may also be becoming more likely. Our East County communities living adjacent to large forests still face the highest risk from fire, but it is increasingly clear that we need to be better prepared in many parts of the County.

I live in Portland, in a part of the city that is not at high risk from wildfire. Our preparations are similar to those for a lot of other hazards - know how to get information and how to evacuate if necessary. We are susceptible to wildfire smoke like everyone else in the county, so we make sure we are getting air quality information and doing the best we can to create a clean air space in our home. Helping out friends, neighbors, and other members of the community is one of the best things people can do in a smoke event, if you are less affected by the smoke and have the opportunity to assist others.