



## Making Mitigation Work: A Webinar Series

### Natural Hazards Center and FEMA Webinar Series "Making Mitigation Work"

#### Written Questions and Answers after the April 14, 2020 Webinar The Quiet Majority: Understanding Communities to Make Mitigation Work

**Chris Barth**, Bureau of Land Management  
**Hannah Brenkert-Smith**, University of Colorado Boulder

**Question from Lissa Radke:** How are you supporting the fire specialists to go to each home to do individualized assessments? Sounds expensive and time consuming? But productive!

**Speaker Response:** The concept of the rapid wildfire risk assessment is that it is rapid. In many communities, especially where homes are on smaller lots, the rapid wildfire risk assessment can take only 60 seconds. The rapid assessment is a much lower investment of time and money, as compared to a detailed, on-site consultation with the homeowner (that can take 60 minutes). We often refer to this as the 60-60 approach - 60 sec rapid assessment, and 60 min on-site consultation. By providing a baseline of risk to ALL residents in an area, the practitioners can meet the needs of some, and those that need more information self-identify by seeking a 60 min consultation from the practitioner organization.

When we first began this work, parcel-level risk assessments were conducted with pen and paper, and later required time for data entry. We developed an app that facilitates data collection. That app harnesses the mapping and geo-coding of county Assessor data and then enables the local practitioner to enter and upload the data relatively quickly. Since we send an outreach letter announcing the effort prior to data collection, residents have an opportunity to learn about the efforts in their area. Our practitioner partners have consistently described the work as being an opportunity to spend time in the communities. They will often meet and chat with residents, which helps them build trust and lines of communication that ultimately help support their programmatic efforts.

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**Question from Thomas C. Jones:** Is there a feature after the mitigation process for landowners to "take credit" for their participation by publicizing the reduction of their fire risk rating in realtor information websites, or for tax reduction?

**Speaker Response:**

This likely remains an under-utilized pathway to spur risk mitigation. Some states offer tax rebates for risk mitigation activities that a property owner undertakes, but this kind of opportunity functions state-

by-state. And there are limits to the extent to which insurance companies are allowed to coordinate, which curtails opportunities to offer industry-wide incentives.

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**Question from Ellen Berggren:** Have you shared your research results with community officials and agencies to help inform their risk communication messaging?

**Speaker Response:**

As part of our standard practices, our goal is to facilitate the processes required to develop a nuanced understanding of what is happening in a community so that the local programs can attend to local needs. Once the data are available, we engage with our partners to interpret the results and to identify what findings might be most useful to support their programmatic goals. Sometimes that simply verifies their priorities. Sometimes, that leads to surprises that set them on a new path. Regardless, we typically co-present research results with our practitioner partners at community meetings- community officials and local agency representatives are often part of that audience. We also work to develop products, such as reports or infographics, that our practitioner partners can use in their on-going interactions with local and state officials.

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**Question from Erica Whitmore:** Are there resources and assessments available for businesses as well?

**Speaker Response:**

The science of mitigating the wildfire risk on any parcel, residential or otherwise, rests on the same fundamentals regarding reducing ignition potential. That said, to date our work has focused on residential properties.

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**Question from Victoria Barksdale:** Can you talk a bit about the resources you engage to create the survey instruments, post cards, etc.?

**Speaker Response:**

Over the years, we have cobbled together support to conduct our work from a range of sources and have had to be creative. We have been grateful to receive direct and indirect support from several federal agencies including the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and the Bureau of Land Management, as well as direct support from National Science Foundation and the University of Colorado. And certainly, our practitioner partners have contributed immensely to these efforts. To date, though we are trying to move toward more sustained funding, our support remains largely ad hoc.

To build survey instruments we start with close engagement with our project partners to ensure that we understand their programs and their priorities. This means we iterate with our project partners to ensure that the batteries of questions and the wording are all useful and appropriate for their programs and the communities that they serve. We also rely heavily upon the social science literature across a range of fields, while keeping our footing in the hazards and disasters literatures. Because wildfire risk management also entails ecosystem management, we keep our footing in these broader literatures.

Over the years, we have worked to streamline our processes, including using local print shops to print, stuff, and mail the surveys, and the use of software that can read survey responses directly into a spreadsheet. Investing in detailing our procedures has taken time but is well worth the increased ease of any individual project and the increased consistency across our project.

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**Question from Kerry Wilson:** How about Homeowners Insurance Company risk rating for Insurance rating?

**Speaker Response**

We often hear anecdotes about policy non-renewal and assumptions about the role of Homeowners Insurance Companies could play in spurring risk mitigation. Our research consistently finds that a very small portion of our study respondents have any engagement with their insurance company about wildfire risk or wildfire mitigation actions.

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**Question from Tracy Richardson:** Will FEMA ever offer wildfire insurance?

**Speaker Response:**

Great question, FEMA would be the best source of a response to that question.

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**Comments, Suggestions, or Questions for the Natural Hazard Center?**

Please contact: [katherine.murphy-1@colorado.edu](mailto:katherine.murphy-1@colorado.edu).

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