

A good first step in conducting effective outreach is to recognize that your audience’s perspectives are different from your own. Don’t assume that your audience cares about the same things you care about; learn about their concerns, and find the points of overlap. And don’t use acronyms or jargon — words that might be used every day in your field but that may be unknown or used differently by the general public. You don’t need to talk down to anyone — people in the U.S. are generally more knowledgeable and accepting of fire than you might think — but get a sense of what people already know, then fill in any gaps using [plain English](#).

Ideally, the language we use should be informed by research and tailored to each of our audiences. If local research isn’t available, national and regional voter survey and focus group data (such as that found in this [recorded presentation of 2016 forest and fire polling results commissioned by The Nature Conservancy](#)) can help us choose words that are likely to resonate with our audiences. The National Fire Protection Association also has some [good tips](#) based on focus groups they facilitated (PDF, 541 KB). Because people need to be exposed to messages multiple times before they “hear” them, if fire and FAC professionals use similar terms and messages, we’ll have a better chance of being heard.

Following is a list of words that FAC Net suggests thinking twice about using with the **general public**, along with alternative terms/phrases to consider. The phrases marked with an (*) reflect specific recommendations provided by communications consultants’ findings from multiple national polls of registered voters. Although this list isn’t meant to be prescriptive, consider that using one word over another could cause your audience to block out your message, or worse, create a negative impression.

Words/Phrases That Could Turn Off or Confuse Non-Fire and FAC Practitioners	These Terms Might Be Better
Fire regime*	Historical or natural fire patterns
Fire managers; fire crews*	Fire teams;* firefighters
Fuel(s)	Flammable material; (overgrown) vegetation
Firewise principles or concepts	Firewise guidelines or information
Hazardous fuel(s)	Flammable material; (overgrown) vegetation
Home assessment/inspection	Home walk-through; Fire risk overview
Incident; wildfire incident	Wildfire; forest fire
Incident management team	Fire team; fire management team
Ingress / egress route	Access roads for emergency vehicles and neighborhood evacuation
Logging ¹	Cutting/removing (overgrown) trees/brush; harvesting trees
Mastication	Using equipment to grind-up overgrown vegetation
Mitigation	Wildfire risk reduction; creating defensible/survivable space; removing/cutting back flammable vegetation
Prescribed fire* ²	Controlled burn*
Slash; slash pile	Forest waste; yard debris; branches and small trees; brush; debris pile
Structure hardening	Fire-resistive construction; improving home survivability
Thinning (trees)*	Cutting/removing overgrown (or excess) trees/brush*
Wildland, ecosystem, landscape*	Natural areas*
Wildland fire*	Fire;* wildfire; forest fire/grass fire
Wildland-urban interface; WUI*	Areas where homes and forests meet*; homes near natural areas

¹ In instances when large amounts of merchantable timber are being removed, some practitioners prefer the term “logging,” believing that other terms could be misleading.

² FAC Net understands that this is a controversial recommendation; however, the findings related to the degree to which this phrase resonates with the public are compelling.

