



Smoke Ready Communities

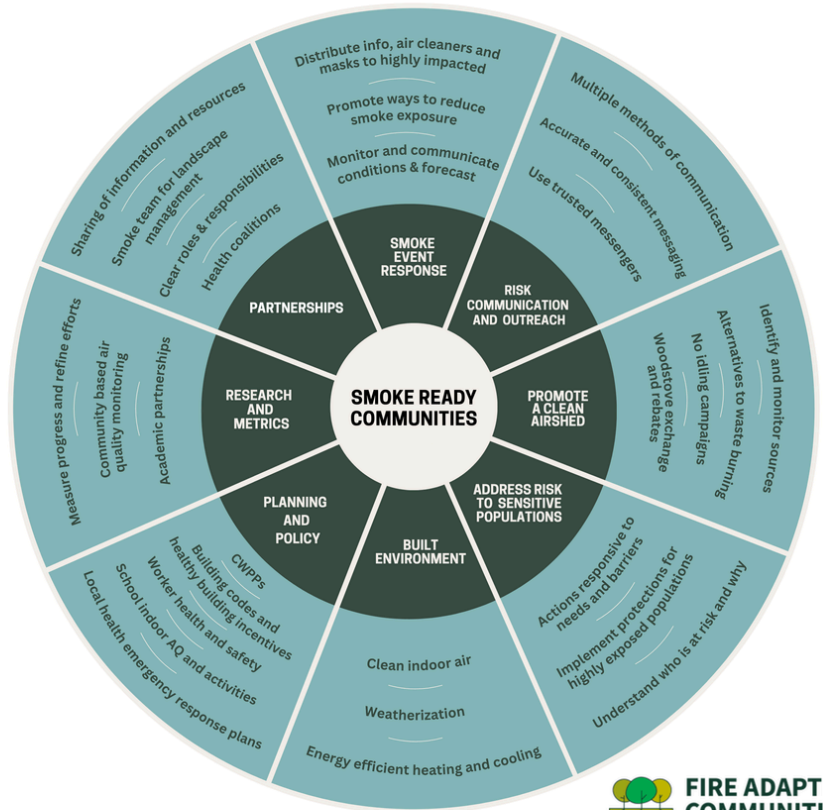
Community Case Studies

Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

July 2025

Fire adapted communities know that living with wildfire means living with smoke. While wildfire often plays a critical ecological and cultural role, promoting smoke preparedness is also important as it helps support healthy communities in the face of wildfire impacts. Smoke-readiness creates support for community members in the face of both extreme wildfire events, as well as prescribed fire.

The [smoke ready community](#) graphics are available as tools to help you and your community engage in partnerships and projects that further your smoke preparedness, (and in turn, your fire adapted communities efforts). This document is available to provide a few on-the-ground examples to inform and inspire your work.



Wildfire adaptation brings many collaboration and coordination challenges, and smoke ready community efforts are no different. A lack of a clear mandate or consensus on leadership roles can make setting direction difficult. While there's broad agreement that preparing communities for smoke is important, lack of centralized authority and undefined funding can make progress feel daunting.

Three communities—each a work in progress—are highlighted below, focusing on how they started, sustain efforts, and collaborate across stakeholders, governance, and funding. Notably, each example credits dedicated staff and leadership at a nonprofit community-based organization (CBO) or pseudo-governmental entity as central to coordinating multi-stakeholder efforts. These organizations also play key partnership roles with local public health departments.



North Central Washington: Building Smoke-Readiness Since 2013

Promote a Clean Air Shed

Partnerships

Research & Metrics

Okanogan, Chelan, Douglas, Grant, and Kittitas Counties—rural, fire-adapted landscapes in North Central Washington (NCW)—experience persistent PM2.5 pollution from wildfire, prescribed burns, agricultural and outdoor burning, and winter woodsmoke. In Okanogan County, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR) Environmental Trust Program had long received air quality complaints, particularly about a polluting mill in Omak. Major wildfires and heavy, prolonged smoke in 2014 prompted CTCR to secure an EPA grant, launching the [Okanogan River Airshed Partnership \(ORAP\)](#) in 2015 with support from WA Department of Ecology. Early collaborators included the Okanogan Conservation District, town mayors, and schools seeking alternatives to burning organic waste. ORAP, led by CTCR, EPA, and WA Ecology, convenes stakeholders twice yearly. These consistent forums build partnerships, align strategies, and strengthen collaboration through shared meals and mutual support. CTCR credits the durability of ORAP to these ongoing relationships.

Nearby, in 2013, a local physician saw how winter woodsmoke harmed her elderly patients. She convened a volunteer group of experts—including the WA Ecology Central Region Smoke Team lead—which sparked the creation of [Clean Air Methow \(CAM\)](#). Initially supported by the Methow Valley Citizen’s Council and a \$2,500 WA Ecology grant, CAM engaged in air quality initiatives such as chipping drives and clean home heating workshops. The devastating 2014 Carlton Complex fire catalyzed CAM’s expansion. With funding from the Community Foundation of NCW, UW EDGE Center, EPA grants, and the participation of many partners, CAM became a year-round program. A part-time air specialist now leads work in smoke-reduction (wood stove exchange, chipping), outreach (Clean Air Ambassadors hosting low-cost sensors, radio and billboard ads), and wildfire smoke preparedness (air cleaner/N95 mask distribution). CAM also supports land managers in prescribed burn communication and at-risk population protection. CAM remains a key contributor to ORAP, and collaborates closely with local public health departments to build smoke-readiness.



Examples of Funding Sources & Partners for Smoke-Readiness (Washington State)

Funding Source	Project Description
Community Foundation of NCW; UW EDGE Center	Community-based air quality monitoring
WA Dept of Natural Resources	Wildfire smoke resiliency planning; air cleaner procurement for public clean air spaces and sensitive populations
EPA Grants	Training local health staff serving sensitive populations; Severe Smoke Episode response planning; ORAP meetings
WA Dept of Health - Public Health Emergency Response	Portable air cleaner distribution
WA Dept of Ecology	Woodstove replacement; smoke readiness and reduction communications (website, billboards, print)
Philanthropy	“Clean Air for All” campaign for portable air cleaners
Private Company	2,000 HEPA air cleaners for distribution to the public
Town & county solid waste partners	Chipping drives as alternatives to burning
EPA & USFS Collaboration	Pilot projects to increase prescribed fire while protecting public health
Firewise, Wildfire Ready Neighbors (WADNR) Partnership	Smoke-ready messaging during home hardening visits
USFS Community Wildfire Defense Grant	Chipping efforts by conservation and fire districts

Read more community projects on the FAC Net Blog



Missoula County, Montana: Building Smoke-Readiness Since 2015

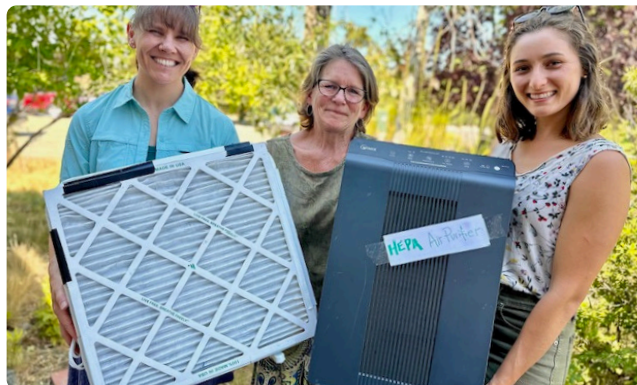
Planning & Policy

Addressing Risk to Sensitive Populations

Built Environment

A locally led climate action planning process helped birth a new community-based non-profit, [Climate Smart Missoula](#) (CSM) in 2015. Wildfire smoke had been named a top concern by the community. Climate Smart Missoula quickly established a close partnership with the Air Quality Specialists at [Missoula Public Health \(MPH\)](#) in 2016 to work on education and portable air cleaner distribution for wildfire smoke protection. Funded by a national foundation, a pilot air cleaner distribution to seniors with respiratory conditions was launched with MPH and Meals on Wheels in summer of 2017. Then, in July, the Rice Ridge wildfire began near the community of Seeley Lake and another significant fire burned for weeks outside Lolo. The program was redirected with additional funding from MPH's Public Health Emergency Preparedness fund to support clinic patients and school children living in hazardous air quality conditions. This extreme wildfire and accompanying smoke added urgency to efforts to ensure clean indoor air spaces across the county.

Since 2017, funding for air cleaner distributions has been provided by United Way of Missoula County, a utility company, the EPA, individual community members, and small foundations. Money for community outreach campaigns has come from the Montana Disaster Recovery Fund (notably to build the excellent <https://www.montanawildfiresmoke.org/>), the Missoula County Fire Protection Association, the MPH Air Pollution Control Program, Missoula County, and United Way of Missoula County. Climate Smart Missoula and MPH have partnered with myriad local social service organizations to assist those individuals most at risk.



Credit: Climate Smart Missoula

Ashland, Oregon: Building Smoke-Readiness Since 2017

Partnerships

Risk Communication & Outreach

Smoke Event Response

[SmokeWise Ashland](#) is local collaborative working group based in Ashland, Oregon with a goal of advancing use of prescribed fire for wildfire risk-reduction while also prioritizing and facilitating community adaptations to smoke. Partners include the City of Ashland, Jackson County Public Health, the Oregon Health Authority, Oregon DEQ, the Ashland Chamber of Commerce, and local CBOs. A need for increasing prescribed fire use and a backlog of prescribed burn acres prompted a stakeholder meeting in January of 2017. This first meeting with health care providers, citizens and stakeholders catalyzed action on better communication and smoke alerts related to prescribed fire. This initial focus on forest health and resiliency, quickly shifted to an emergency response during a wildfire smoke event in 2017. This was one of many subsequent wildfire smoke events that severely impacted Ashland's tourism-based economy. The increase in wildfire smoke duration and intensity prompted a swift release of the Smokewise Ashland website by partners and intensified the Ashland Chamber of Commerce efforts to address needs of the business community. As a result, partnerships for addressing health requirements of the community deepened.

[Ashland Forest Resiliency](#) assigned a community outreach coordinator to develop communications about health risks, benefits of prescribed burning, and exposure mitigation. The role expanded to support organizations communicating to at-risk communities about smoke. The City of Ashland maintains grant funded staffing for organizing smoke coordination. Support came from the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Oregon DEQ, and OSU's ASPIRE program, which is also a partner in an EPA grant that supports school indoor air quality improvements as a wildfire resiliency strategy. Key partners like Ashland Chamber of Commerce, Asante Health and Jackson County Public Health developed brochures, a video, and a [community smoke response plan](#) (CRP). Leadership of community smoke response at the local level has been challenging due to persistently low capacity, a common theme in local public health departments. Momentum is maintained by ensuring the Ashland CRP is implemented collaboratively with community engagement and communication during smoke events, both planned and unexpected.



Ashland Fire & Rescue uses prescribed fire for risk reduction.

Credit: City of Ashland

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For questions & more information, visit us at fireadaptednetwork.org