

Awareness and preparedness of population at wildfire risk

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Abstract

Forest fires pose a recurrent threat with significant consequences for populations residing in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). These areas are of critical importance for preventing and managing inhabited areas with high fire risk due to the presence and the likelihood of substantial personal and material damage caused by fire. While eliminating the risk of fire may not be feasible under current conditions, mitigating the potential impact of fires on populations can be achieved through the application of preventive and mitigation measures. This communication aims to present the findings of a study that sought to determine the level of awareness and preparedness of the population in responding to fires.

The study employed personal and online interviews conducted with households situated in rural and peri-urban areas of Galicia (NW Spain), where forest fires have had a high incidence. A structured questionnaire was administered consisting of questions on the causes of forest fires, risk perception, fire preparedness of the population, and preventive measures to be taken to minimize the potential damage caused by fires.

The findings highlight the need to promote self-protection measures among the population through specific regulations, incentives, and insurance, with a focus on the construction materials of buildings and the surrounding area. Furthermore, the results suggest that public education campaigns may be necessary to enhance the population's understanding of the risks posed by forest fires and the measures that can be taken to reduce their impact. Our results show the importance of assessing the level of awareness and preparedness of the population to respond to forest fires. Promoting preventive and mitigation measures and enhancing public education and awareness are crucial steps in reducing the potential impacts of forest fire on populations residing in the WUI.

Keywords: preparedness, wildland-urban interface, wildfires, Galicia

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