

PREPAREDNESS DAYS: A Practical Guide to Wildfire Preparedness

What are Preparedness Days?

Preparedness Days are **community preparedness events** that strengthen communities' capacity to address wildfire risk.

They create opportunities for residents, public authorities, emergency services and local organisations to come together and **share information, experiences and concerns** related to wildfire risk.

Every community experiences wildfire risk differently. Vulnerabilities, resources and forms of organisation can vary considerably. For this reason, Preparedness Days are **designed as a flexible, context-based approach** that can take many forms, such as **participatory workshops, community work days, drills, educational activities, or spaces for dialogue**.

Beyond simply sharing information, these events help identify local vulnerabilities, exchange knowledge and strengthen trust and collaboration between communities and institutions. These are key elements for improving preparedness for wildfires.

Similar initiatives are being developed in several countries. In the United States and Canada, for example, the Wildfire Community Preparedness Day is celebrated every first Saturday in May and promotes community action to reduce wildfire risk. In Europe, projects such as FIREPRIME have experimented with this type of event in wildland urban interface communities.

Preparedness
is a shared
responsibility

You can find useful resources through the European programme **FIREPRIME**, the **Firewise** programme (USA), the **FireSmart** programme (Canada), and the **Aldeia Segura Pessoas Seguras** programme (Portugal).



FIREPRIME is a project by:

When to organise it?

A Preparedness Day can be organised at any time of the year. However, the time of year may influence the topics addressed. For example:

Spring and summer



- Preparing for the wildfire season
- Preventing accidental ignitions
- How to act during a wildfire

Autumn and winter



- Home protection measures
- Vegetation management in residential areas
- Community organisation and living with wildfire risk

It is best not to wait until the wildfire season to start taking action.

Some actions need to be carried out at specific times of the year, such as pruning or vegetation management, while others may require authorisation, such as burning vegetation residues. Other measures require prior planning, such as developing a Community Self-Protection Plan. Some actions also require sustained effort over time, such as strengthening community ties and neighbourhood support networks.



Who participates?

The people who take part in a Preparedness Day will depend on the event's objectives and the context of each community. When inviting participants, it is advisable to **consider representativeness and inclusiveness**, ensuring that people of different ages, genders and backgrounds are involved.

It can also be useful to **invite organisations and services that work with local residents**, especially those that have contact with groups in vulnerable situations, such as social services, organisations working with migrant communities, or associations linked to older people.

Informal networking space

Setting aside time during the event for a **small refreshment or informal gathering** can help participants connect and create a more relaxed atmosphere where conversations can continue. These moments often **help build trust and strengthen relationships** between communities, institutions and services involved in risk management.



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Dialogue event on wildfire risk for community preparedness

We present here a **proposed Preparedness Day focused on dialogue**, inspired by the experience developed within the FIREPRIME project with three wildland urban interface communities.

The event is designed as a **structured space for dialogue** where communities, public authorities, and emergency services can **analyse wildfire risk** in the specific context of each neighbourhood and **identify possible preparedness actions**.

Its aim is to encourage dialogue among different actors, improve understanding of risk at the local level, and strengthen coordination and collective preparedness. Beyond simply sharing information, a dialogue-focused Preparedness Day helps **identify local vulnerabilities, exchange knowledge and strengthen trust and collaboration between communities and institutions**. These are key elements for improving wildfire preparedness.

This guide is intended as a **flexible and adaptable resource** to support the organisation of dialogue-based events, allowing the format to be tailored to each local context.

What is the purpose of a Preparedness Day as a dialogue space?



To analyse wildfire risk collectively at neighbourhood level.



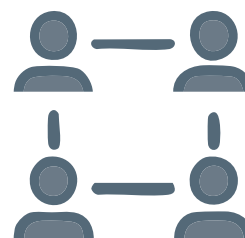
To share knowledge and experiences between communities and institutions.



To improve communication and coordination among local actors.



To support communities in developing preparedness and self-protection strategies.



To strengthen community networks and build trust among different actors.

It is not a lecture. It is a conversation.

What can a Preparedness Day offer?

Not all neighbourhoods are the same:

In communities that are less organised around wildfire risk, a Preparedness Day can help **make vulnerabilities visible, raise awareness and initiate processes of community organisation.**

In more established communities or those with prior experience in preparedness and self-protection, it can help **refine protocols, review coordination mechanisms, and explore more complex wildfire scenarios.**

Who participates?

- ✓ Residents and local associations.
- ✓ Volunteers involved in risk management, such as forest defence groups or civil protection volunteers.
- ✓ Emergency services and operational agencies, such as fire services, civil protection, rural agents or police.
- ✓ Political representatives and technical staff, especially from local or regional administrations.
- ✓ Representatives of organisations or institutions relevant to the territory, such as natural parks or environmental organisations.

Diversity enriches dialogue

Location

The event can be organised in a space that allows for a plenary session alongside small-group discussions. This could be a community centre, a neighbourhood facility or any suitable space to host the meeting.

It is advisable to choose a space that is **accessible, comfortable, and familiar to the community**, thereby facilitating participation and dialogue among participants.

Before the event

In addition to organising the logistical aspects of the event, it is also important to prepare the dialogue process. For example:



Prepare a **guide with the main discussion topics** and an estimated time for each section.



Designate a **facilitator** for the session and a **support person** for the facilitation.



Prepare **materials that help stimulate dialogue** (printed maps, markers, post-its, pens, etc.).



Prepare a **summary sheet** to collect conclusions, including the main thematic areas and space to note possible actions or next steps.



Prepare a **contact sheet** for participants.

Questions that may help organise a Preparedness Day and consolidate its results

1. What is your main objective?
2. What is the starting point of the community?
3. Which thematic areas should guide the dialogue?
4. Which visual materials could support the discussion? How can they be obtained?
5. Who will facilitate the discussion?
6. Who should be part of the conversation?
7. Are you prepared to follow up on the results?
8. Will participants include people who can take on relevant commitments?

Facilitating the dialogue

The facilitator does more than simply manage speaking turns. Their role is to create a safe and respectful space for conversation, stimulate dialogue through questions, help translate technical or institutional language, and ensure that all voices are heard, especially those who tend to participate less.

The person supporting the facilitation helps manage the timing, assists participants in using the discussion materials, and supports the group process if the conversation needs to be redirected or a point needs to be clarified.



Dialogue session structure

The event can be organised into different moments that combine information sharing, dialogue and collective work. Below is an example of a possible structure that may last 2-3 hours, depending on the context and the number of participants.

1. Introduction by the organising team

Welcome, presentation of the event's objectives, introduction of the invited participants, and overview of the agenda.



2. Brief contextual presentation

A short intervention that helps frame the wildfire risk or share a relevant experience. For example, a community self-protection group may explain its experience, or a member of the fire service may present wildfire risk in the region.



3. Small group discussions

This is the central moment of the event, dedicated to dialogue and collective reflection. Participants work in small groups (ideally 6-8 people) seated around a table with materials that support discussion (maps, markers, post-its, etc.).

The facilitator explains the dynamics and invites the group to designate one or two people to record the main ideas and act as spokespersons during the plenary discussion.

Using a set of guiding questions, the group discusses the different topics. A few minutes before finishing, the group summarises the main ideas and completes the conclusions sheet.



Examples of questions to stimulate dialogue:

1. In the event of a wildfire affecting the neighbourhood, which aspects, places or situations would concern you the most?

(Access routes, sheltering in place, evacuation, mobility, vulnerable people, vegetation close to homes, etc.)

2. What actions or resources already available in the neighbourhood could help in the event of a wildfire?

(Neighbourhood networks, community self-protection groups, local knowledge of the area, previous experiences, etc.)

3. What actions or resources could help improve the neighbourhood's preparedness? Who could be involved?

(Improving communication and information among neighbours, organising community work days to reduce vegetation fuel, identifying people who may need support during sheltering or evacuation, creating a self-protection group, holding a dialogue with the fire service, etc.)

4. Plenary sharing

Each group's spokespersons present a brief summary of the main ideas and topics discussed.



5. Questions and joint discussion

A space for questions and for identifying possible next steps. Based on the ideas agreed upon during the discussion, commitments or small follow-up teams may be established.



6. Closing the event

The organising team thanks participants and explains how the results will be shared and what the possible next steps may be.



7. Refreshments and informal networking

A relaxed moment to continue conversations and facilitate contact among participants.



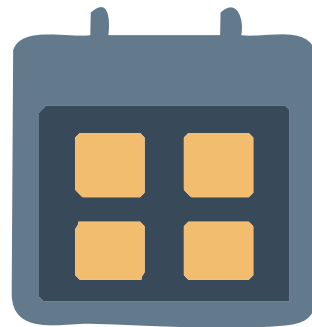
After the event

After the Preparedness Day, **it is important to share the main outcomes with participants.** Sharing a short summary of the ideas discussed and the possible lines of action helps maintain trust, ensure continuity and reinforce the commitment of the actors involved.

Some simple actions can help consolidate the results of the event:



Share a short summary of the conclusions with participants.



Identify possible actions or future meetings to continue the work initiated.



Maintain a communication channel between the actors involved.

<https://fireprime.eu/>



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