	How To: ## Communicate with Your Community
SUMMARY	Steady communication with your Firewise Community is critical to keeping residents engaged and informed about the latest wildfire safety information, upcoming Firewise Community events, educational opportunities, news items pertinent to wildfire safety and welcoming and informing new members. When people sign up for your Firewise Community, you should collect enough information to make it possible to communicate your messages to them. Most Firewise Communities collect names, street addresses, email addresses and phone numbers. Keep a current list of this data available to your Firewise Community committee with the understanding that this information will only be used for its intended purposes. Keep communications focused on wildfire safety and avoid polarizing topics like politics.
OPTIONS	Firewise Communities use a variety of communication avenues: • **Email** is the most common, rapid and easiest method of communication with your Firewise Community members. Most people today (but not all) are accustomed to using email. You can easily add attachments, or links, to the email to share additional resources. Some Firewise Communities send out a periodic email newsletter to keep members informed about the community or general information on wildfire safety. This can help keep members engaged and confident that the Firewise Community is active. The trick is to not inundate your members with too much email, or they may not read it all. It is recommended that you send messages with the "bcc" option for several reasons: a. Protects the personal email addresses from unauthorized use, b. Reassures members that you are using their information responsibly, and, c. Prevents members from receiving additional follow up questions and comments, to the sender, that may arise within the group in reaction to the original email. Email is also useful for soliciting participants for a Firewise Community event such as a meeting, educational event or work party. RSVP is easy.

	• **Social Media** can be useful to keep people informed, but not all members use social media. The advantages are that information can be rapidly distributed, such as during a wildfire or evacuation. You will need a volunteer who is well-versed in whichever particular social media application you choose to use. • **Text Groups** can be used to send out short messages and encourage member interaction. Small groups may be supported by your cellphone carrier while larger groups will need to utilized available Text Group applications like Signal or WhatsApp. • **Zoom Meetings** became common place in reaction to the pandemic. The advantages are that you do not need to find a large venue to hold an in-person meeting, people can join the meeting even if they are traveling and it is easy to show slides or documents with screen sharing. With a knowledgeable technician and the right equipment, you might be able to hold a hybrid ZOOM/IN-PERSON meeting to accommodate more guests. • **In-Person Meetings** provide the distinct advantage of the best social interaction of the membership. There is time before and after the meeting for people to chat about personal matters and get to know one another. The definition of community building. At in-person meetings, you have the opportunity to hand out printed educational materials, and let's not forget the opportunity to share homemade treats! However, it can sometimes be difficult to reserve a venue large enough to accommodate your membership and provide sufficient parking. In the right weather, outdoor meetings at parks are a possibility – along with a post-meeting BBQ. • **Guest Speakers** usually attract more participants at a meeting. You may want to invite someone from CALFIRE, your local fire department, Office of Emergency Services staff, foresters or ecologists to present a topic of interest to your Firewise Community. • **Alternative Communication Systems** are an option when regular systems fail. During wildfires your community might want to pass on brief messages on short notice. These messages can alert people to a rapidly changing event and give them time to safely evacuate or prepare their homes. Typical methods include short-distance walkie talkies, 2-way

	radio networks (Amateur Radio Emergency Service-ARES), telephone apps (like Phonevite.com) or neighborhood phone trees. These methods require substantial organization beforehand, adequate and regular training of the participants, and periodic testing of the systems. • **Letters or Cards via USPS** mail seem like a slow and old-fashioned method of communication. However, if you want to attract more Firewise Community members that you do not know personally, a well-written invitation letter, with the Firewise Community contact information, may attract new members. It can be a time-consuming and somewhat costly method, but it has been used successfully in large Firewise Communities to expand membership and participation. • **Neighbor to Neighbor** word-of-mouth is always important in attracting new Firewise Community members. Active members should be encouraged to talk to their neighbors about the importance of joining the Firewise Community. When new people move into the community they should be welcomed, given information on wildfire safety, and encouraged to join the Firewise Community. Sometimes new members bring essential skills to the community and can be recruited to help with events or join the Firewise Community committee.
TIPS	Regular communication is essential to keeping a Firewise Community active and informed. Consider the method you are most comfortable using and that your community is most likely to use.