

RC3 Wildfire and Readiness Poll Results

Between February and March 2024, the Residents Coalition of Chelan County (RC3) conducted an online Wildfire Preparedness and Readiness Survey. The survey link was shared on the RC3 website, websites of other non-profit organizations, and various social media platforms targeting residents of Chelan County. A total of 288 Chelan County residents from across the county participated in the survey.

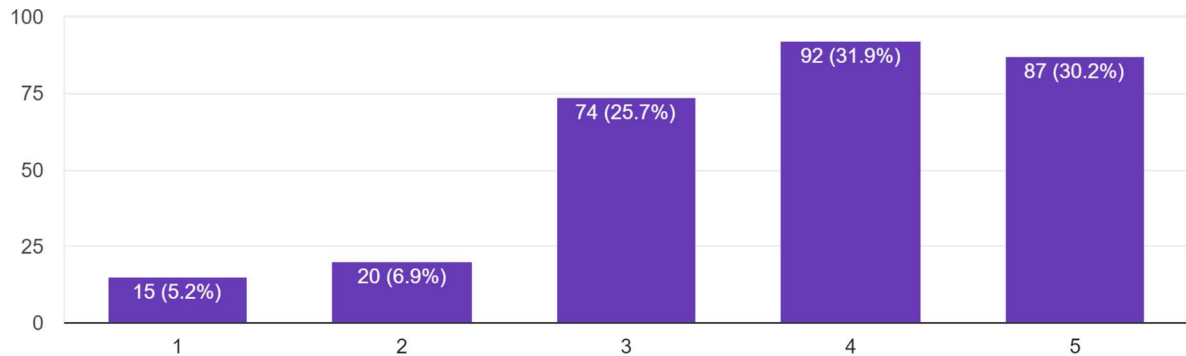
The following sections outline the key findings from the survey, including quantitative results from the multiple-choice questions as well as comments derived from participants' freeform suggestions.

All of the original data and comments can be found at this [Link](#).

Immediate wildfire threat: How worried are you about the immediate threat of a wildfire occurring near your home or property?

1 – Not Worried....5 – Very Worried

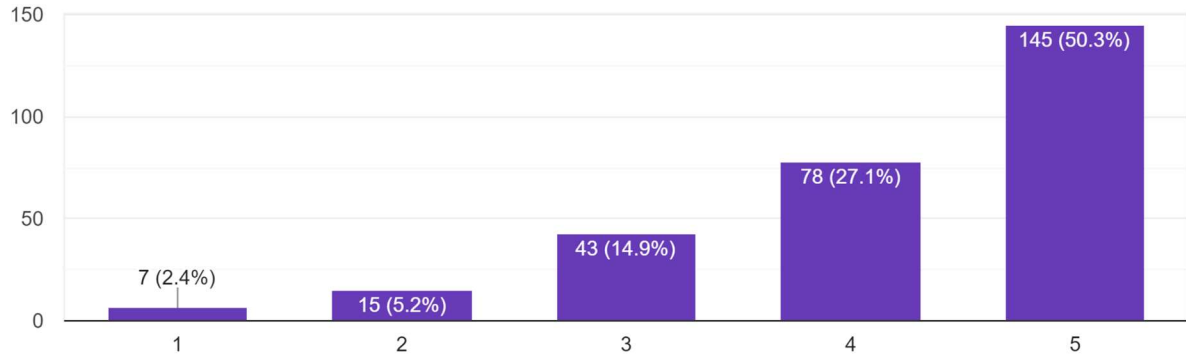
(288 Responses)



Smoke exposure and air quality: How concerned are you about the health impacts of smoke exposure during forest fire seasons?

1 – Not Concerned....5 – Very Concerned

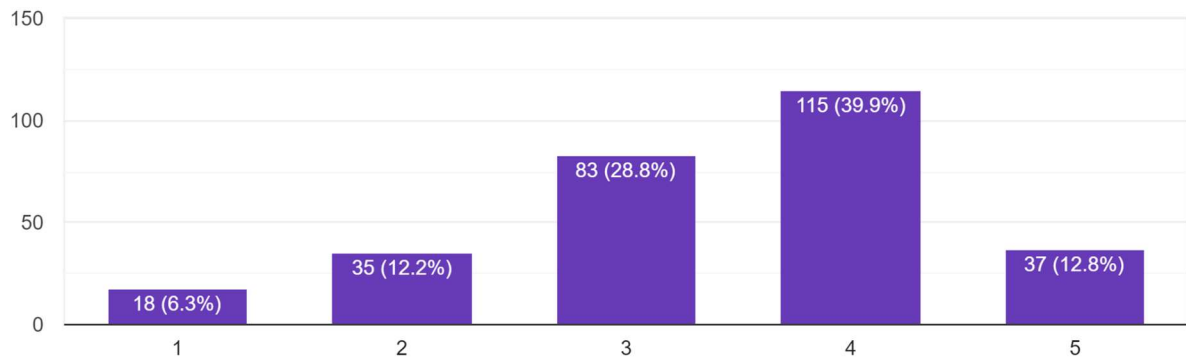
(288 Responses)



Evacuation preparedness: How well-prepared do you feel for a potential evacuation in case of a wildfire?

1 – Not Prepared....5 – Very Prepared

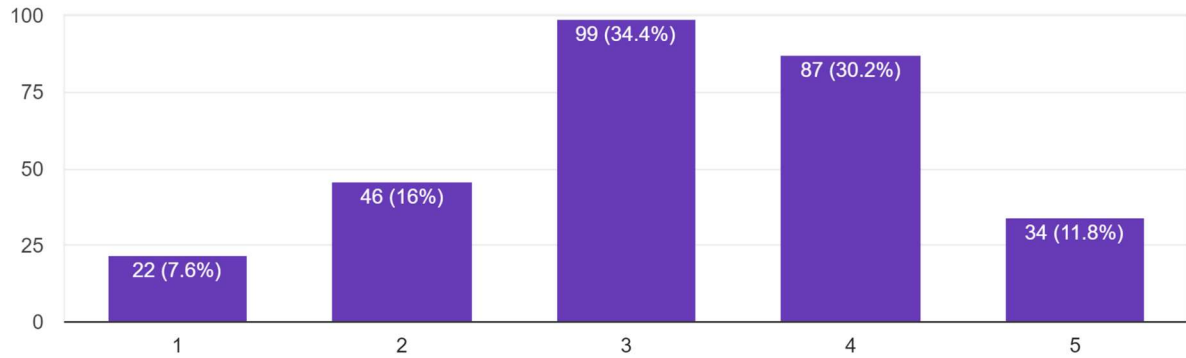
(288 Responses)



Communication and information: How satisfied are you with the timeliness and accuracy of the information provided by local agencies during wildfire and smoke events?

1 – Not Satisfied....5 – Very Satisfied

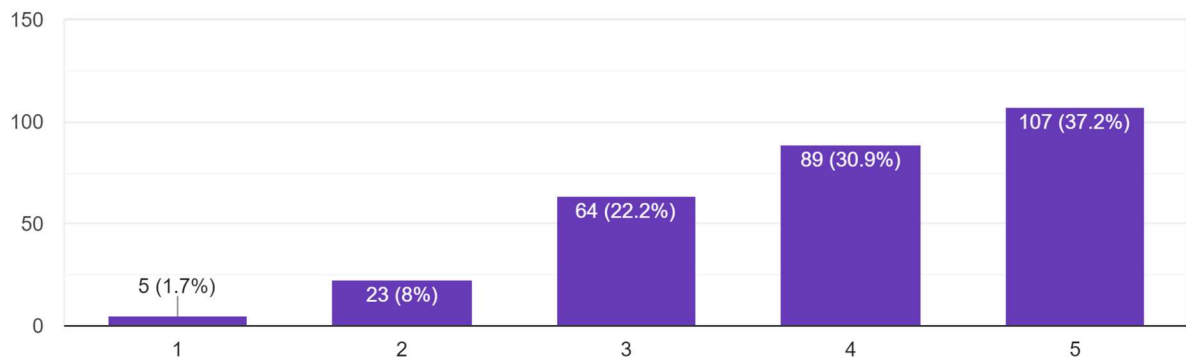
(288 Responses)



Social and Financial impacts: How worried are you about the social and financial impacts of wildfires on individuals and families in our community?

1 – Not Worried....5 – Very Worried

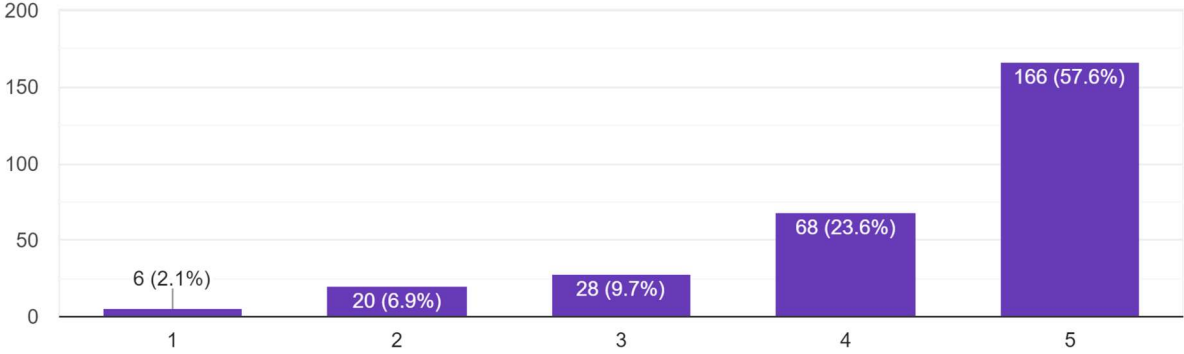
(288 Responses)



Home Insurance access costs: How concerned are you about the availability and cost of home insurance due to wildfire risk in our area?

1 – Not Concerned....5 – Very Concerned

(288 Responses)



Freeform Responses

In the following sections participants were able to respond to the following questions:

- “Other concerns: Please write in any other concerns you have related to forest fires or smoke not listed above.”
- “What information or resources would be most helpful to you in preparing for future wildfires?”
- “Are there any vulnerable populations in our community who may need additional support during wildfire events?”
- “What specific challenges do you face in staying informed or prepared for wildfires?”

Other Concerns

The written comments raise a variety of concerns about wildfires in Chelan County. Here's a breakdown of the key points:

Fire risk and prevention

- Dense forests and dead trees increase fire risk.
- People not understanding fire risks or following fire restrictions.
- Lack of forest management, thinning, and controlled burns.
- Short-term rentals and uninformed visitors pose a risk.
- Concerns about the effectiveness of the "let it burn" policy for remote fires.
- Need for more education and outreach about fire preparedness.

Evacuation planning and infrastructure

- Limited evacuation routes and potential gridlock during fires.
- Dead-end roads and lack of secondary exits for some neighborhoods.
- Concerns about evacuation from tourist areas during peak season.
- Lack of evacuation plans for some areas.

Communication and information

- Difficulty getting timely and accurate information during wildfires.
- Need for multiple communication channels (web, phone, radio) that don't rely on internet.
- Public confusion about fire restrictions and air quality updates.

Insurance

- Difficulty obtaining or keeping fire insurance due to high risk.
- Impact of fire risk on property values.

Other concerns

- Impact of smoke from wildfires on air quality and health.
- Lack of fire hydrants in some areas.
- Response times for firefighters, particularly to outlying areas.

The comments also offer some suggestions for improvement, such as:

- More aggressive forest management, thinning, and controlled burns.
- Improved evacuation planning and infrastructure.
- Better public education and outreach about fire preparedness and evacuation procedures.
- More reliable communication channels during wildfires.
- Addressing the issue of rising insurance costs in high-risk areas.

Overall, the comments highlight the significant concern about wildfires in Chelan County and the need for a comprehensive approach to prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Need for More Information or Resources

Many comments highlighted several key areas where residents would like more information and resources:

- **Evacuation planning and procedures:** Many people are concerned about evacuation routes, especially during peak tourist season. There is a desire for clear and concise evacuation plans that are communicated effectively.
- **Communication during wildfires:** Residents want timely and accurate information during wildfires, especially if traditional channels like social media are unavailable. Many prefer alerts via text message, email, or a dedicated website.
- **Defensible space:** There is interest in creating defensible space around homes, but some residents find it difficult or expensive to clear brush and debris. Financial assistance and chipping programs are seen as helpful resources.
- **Forest management:** Many comments call for more aggressive forest management, including thinning and controlled burns, to reduce fire risk.
- **Public education and outreach:** Residents would benefit from educational programs about fire preparedness, evacuation procedures, and creating defensible space.

Here are some additional insights from the comments:

- Some residents expressed frustration with the current communication methods used by fire agencies during wildfires.
- There is a concern about the rising cost of fire insurance and the impact of wildfires on property values.
- A few comments mentioned the need for better monitoring of illegal burning and better visibility of fire hydrants.

- Some residents praised existing programs, such as the Lake Wenatchee Fire & Rescue chipping service and firewise programs.

Overall, the comments show a strong desire for more collaboration between residents and fire agencies to improve wildfire preparedness in Chelan County.

Vulnerable Populations

Analysis of wildfire vulnerable populations in Chelan County

The comments overwhelmingly acknowledge that there are vulnerable populations in Chelan County who require additional support during wildfires. Here's a breakdown of the identified groups:

- **Age:**
 - Elderly residents, especially those living alone or with mobility limitations.
 - Children who may be home alone when parents are working.
- **Location:**
 - Residents of assisted living facilities and group homes.
 - People living in remote areas with limited evacuation routes or single access points.
 - Vacation rental guests unfamiliar with the area and evacuation procedures.
- **Health:**
 - People with underlying respiratory conditions who are more susceptible to smoke inhalation.
 - People with disabilities or limited mobility who may struggle to evacuate.
- **Socioeconomic factors:**
 - Low-income residents who may not have resources for transportation for evacuation.
 - Non-English speaking residents who may have difficulty understanding emergency information.
 - Homeless population.

There are also concerns about:

- **Pets and livestock:** Evacuation plans and shelters for animals during wildfires.
- **Uninformed populations:**
 - Residents who don't use social media and rely on alternative information sources.
 - Tourists and visitors unfamiliar with wildfire risks and evacuation procedures.

Recommendations

The comments suggest several ways to improve support for vulnerable populations:

- **Develop a comprehensive evacuation plan:** This plan should include
 - Strategies for evacuating people from assisted living facilities, group homes, and remote areas.
 - Utilizing public transportation (school buses) for mass evacuations.
 - Identifying alternative evacuation routes to avoid congestion.
- **Targeted outreach and education:**
 - Create informative materials (pamphlets) for vacation rentals explaining wildfire risks and evacuation procedures.
 - Provide public education programs in multiple languages.
 - Conduct outreach to elderly residents and those with disabilities to assess their needs and develop support plans.
- **Vulnerable person registry:** Consider creating a registry of vulnerable residents who may need extra assistance during evacuations.
- **Volunteer network:** Establish a network of volunteers to help vulnerable residents with evacuation and other needs.
- **Communication efforts:** Ensure multiple channels are used to disseminate emergency information, including for non-English speakers.
- **Animal shelters:** Develop plans for sheltering pets and livestock during wildfires.
- **Financial assistance:** Provide financial assistance programs to help low-income residents prepare their properties and evacuate if necessary.

By implementing these recommendations, Chelan County can ensure a more inclusive and effective emergency response system that considers the needs of all residents during wildfires.

Challenges

Analysis of wildfire preparedness comments in Chelan County

The comments highlight several key challenges faced by residents in staying informed and prepared for wildfires. Here's a breakdown of the main themes:

- **Communication Issues:**
 - Inconsistent and slow updates from agencies during fires.
 - Reliance on social media (particularly Facebook) which not everyone uses.
 - Poor radio reception and concerns about outdated information on websites.
 - Difficulty for non-permanent residents to stay informed.
- **Information Access:**
 - Lack of a centralized source for accurate and up-to-date information.
 - Difficulty finding information during power or internet outages.
 - Need for more education on fire preparedness, defensible space, and resources available.

- **Evacuation Concerns:**
 - Limited evacuation routes and potential congestion on Highway 2.
 - Lack of awareness about evacuation plans, especially for non-residents.
- **Other Challenges:**
 - Physical limitations for some residents to prepare their properties.
 - Concerns about smoke impacting health, especially for vulnerable populations.
 - Inaccurate information circulating on social media.
 - Disagreement on the timing of forest management activities (chipping, burning).

The comments also reveal some positive aspects:

- Residents who actively seek out information and participate in preparedness programs.
- Appreciation for existing programs like chipping services and firewise initiatives.
- Recognition of the importance of defensible space and riparian vegetation protection.

Recommendations

Based on the comments, here are some recommendations for improving wildfire preparedness in Chelan County:

- Develop a **centralized information system** with real-time updates accessible through multiple channels (website, text alerts, radio).
- Increase focus on **outreach and education** through diverse channels, including non-social media platforms.
- Ensure **clear and consistent communication** during wildfires, with emphasis on evacuation procedures.
- Conduct **regular public meetings** to discuss fire risks, preparedness, and evacuation plans.
- Explore the feasibility of **alternative evacuation routes** and resident education on using them.
- Offer **assistance programs** for elderly or physically limited residents to create defensible space.
- Partner with local media to provide **accurate and timely information** during wildfires.
- Conduct a **communication needs assessment** to understand resident preferences for receiving information.

By addressing these challenges and implementing the recommendations, Chelan County can empower residents to be better prepared for wildfires.