

# Have We Mitigated the Home Fires Burning?

## Abstract

The summer of 2003 was the worst ever for forest fires in British Columbia. In total, 310 homes and nine businesses were destroyed, over 36,000 people were evacuated, 265,000 hectares burned and suppression costs were in excess of \$375 million. As the Strategic Wildfire Prevention Initiative introduced in the wake of this catastrophic year reaches a crossroads, an outstanding question remains: Has the fire mitigation work conducted by the Provincial government using fuel management techniques on crown land in the wildland urban interface impacted private land owners perceptions and behaviours on their own lands.

I intend to answer this question in two phases: First, risk factors associated with combustible forest fuels will be evaluated for private properties selected at random within the interface areas of the Kamloops Fire Zone. Assessment will be made using a modified FireSmart rating system for 25 properties adjacent to fuel treated land and 25 adjacent to non-treated lands. The means of assessment will be compared using a t-test to determine if homes near fuel treated areas have a lower risk rating. During the second phase of this study, these private land owners will receive a mail out survey in order to derive a better understanding of their risk mitigation perceptions, motivations and behaviours.

Wildfires are becoming more common; minimizing their potential negative impacts is dependent on understanding what makes homeowners more or less willing to take action. As the current model of fuel management is unsustainable, this understanding will have a major impact on policy and drive future strategic fire prevention initiatives in British Columbia and other wildfire prone jurisdictions.