



National Wildfire Coordinating Group Communicator's Guide for Wildland Fire Management: *Fire Education, Prevention, and Mitigation Practices*

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Communication Materials

Specific guidelines for various communication tools are outlined in this chapter. This chapter is written in a general sense, not tied to specific types of fire communication such as education, prevention, or mitigation. However, some materials may lend themselves to certain forms of outreach.

Introduction

Supporting materials are essential to most communications programs, providing a written source for your audiences to reference as they move to act on your message. There are a number of formats to consider based on your communication needs. Materials should be designed to appeal to a specific audience and should consider background, age, and interest of the users.

News releases and other media relations tools are covered in the **Communication Planning and Strategy** chapter.

Sample guidelines for materials are included in this section.

A Note on Style

As you prepare your written materials, you may want to consult a style manual to ensure consistency in your materials. Following are several options. Your agency's public information/public affairs officer may be able to tell you if your agency has a preferred style manual.

Printing Style

U.S. Government Printing Office Style Manual (Excerpt from Web site)

By act of Congress the Public Printer of the U.S. Government Printing Office is authorized to determine the form and style of Government printing. The Style Manual is the product of many years of public printing experience, and its rules are based on principles of good usage and custom in the printing trade. The Style Manual has served Federal printers since 1894, and with this 29th edition, the traditions of printing and graphic arts are carried forward into new technologies.

www.gpoaccess.gov/stylemanual/index.html

Writing Style

AP Stylebook

Perhaps the most universal style manual among news media and communication specialists, the *AP Stylebook* offers guidelines on spelling, usage, grammar, and punctuation.

www.apstylebook.com

The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage

Similar to the AP Stylebook, this manual offers guidelines on spelling, usage, grammar, and punctuation.

Available at bookstores.

Multimedia

Web Sites, Blogs

Perhaps the most universal means of sharing information and collaborating with the public is through your Web site – and your blog. Web sites and blogs offer the ability to create dialogue with your audiences, rather than speaking to them. It's not a one-way communication, but rather an open communication channel for both sides to gain insight, perspective, and ultimately collaboration.

That said, online communications is not like traditional offline communications. The information has to be clear, concise, and layered, enabling the user to easily and quickly navigate to the information they are looking for. Content should move from broad and concise on entry pages, to narrow and detailed as the user drills deeper. An outside-in approach to nomenclature and tone is the best approach to keeping things in context for the user.

Firewise.org introduced a blog in May 2006, and has begun using this form of communication to call attention to timely topics such as having a “Firewise Fourth” with fireworks safety and ongoing topics of interest such as insurance issues.

Additionally, one new blog is started roughly every minute, presenting the opportunity to engage your audiences (and prospective audiences) in active dialogue and showcase their expertise.

E-Newsletters

Electronic newsletters, or e-newsletter, can be a highly efficient method of communicating directly with your audiences, and encouraging interaction via the Web. An electronic newsletter is published online and often distributed to subscribers through e-mail. Following are a few tips:

- It is best to provide a landing site on a Web site for archives of e-newsletters to be placed by subject or date.
- A good newsletter pays attention to production values and provides well-designed graphics, an appropriate layout, and plenty of images or photos.
- A Web site URL should be present on every e-communication material delivered so that usage is trackable and there is a way to determine click through rates. Measure not only open rates and transactions, but also content popularity (what are they reading, how long are they spending reading it?).
- The best way to achieve results through an e-newsletter is to provide a cross-selling component. Provide links to the URL so people can sign up for the e-newsletter, but also provide links back to the URL in the actual newsletter.
- Subscribers should also be invited to “tell a friend” about the e-newsletter or be able to send articles to friends that contain the URL. Other technology to build on in an e-newsletter is to consider putting a podcast in your e-newsletter or offer e-newsletter content as an RSS feed, particularly if you have a techno-savvy audience.

Consult your agency's Interactive team, or work with a contractor that specializes in online communication.

Interactive Compact Disks, DVDs

CDs/DVDs are relatively inexpensive per user contact. As in other interpretive materials, the medium (technology) cannot overshadow the message. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the communicator to develop the thematic story based on clear, concise objectives. Without such guidance we run the risk of substituting novelty for substance. Colleagues who have experience with this medium's development should be contacted prior to initiating your first CD/DVD development project. DVDs are becoming more prevalent than CDs as the technology develops, but CDs are still a cost-effective, relevant option.

Movies and Videos

In addition to videos, a number of television and theater releases are now educating the public about wildland fire. The showing of wildland fire movies or documentaries on television or in the theatre, or the printing of a special wildland fire section in a local newspaper provides an educational opportunity. Agency personnel can build on these events by arranging for:

- A companion display at the theater.
- A special program or display at the visitor center or community center.
- Special environmental education programs at local schools.

Some television stations, newspapers, and advertisements for upcoming theater presentations can include announcements of special companion programs presented by your resource management agency. The involvement of private sector programming in communicating natural resource management messages, such as wildland fire, greatly improves the interpreter's chance of message receptivity and understanding by visitors and community members.

Several states including [Florida](#) and [Kentucky](#) have developed state-specific CD-ROMs on fire prevention.



The NOVA program *Fire Wars* is one example of a video.
www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/fire

On *Fire Wars*, NOVA accompanies the men and women of the Arrowhead Hotshots during the summer of 2000, one of the most destructive wildfire seasons ever, in which more than six million acres burned.

Print Materials

Fact Sheets

A fact sheet is a simple, cost effective method for sharing information about a specific topic. Often one or two pages and printed on 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper, a fact sheet can lay out the details of an issue or activity. Fact sheets also can be e-mailed in Word or PDF for immediate distribution. When developing fact sheets that may be shared electronically, convert them to PDF or use a Windows product such as Microsoft Word that most people are able to access.

Brochures

Before developing a brochure, be sure it is justified in terms of the context and expected use. For example, for homeowners in the WUI, include a local land map with the planned prescribed burns for the next three years. Specific information such as this is more likely to compel to your audience to keep these brochures, posting them on refrigerators and referring to them each burning season when they see smoke in the air.

Brochures range in all shapes and sizes based on agency guidelines, expertise available, and immediacy of the need to convey the message. With the advent of desktop publishing everyone can now produce a brochure. One of the more basic rules in brochure design is to use a grid system to help guide the layout. Also, avoid overkill with mixing font types, use relevant graphics, leave white space, and keep the message focused on a thematic message (less is more). Also, lack of attention to details can leave a visitor with a less than desirable experience.

Brochure Inserts

Where brochures exist and there is a need to infuse a wildland fire message, or where the message does not warrant the development of a full brochure, an insert may suffice. Inserts are printed on heavy paper, such as card stock, and are approximately the same width and length as the folded brochure. If standard width and stock can be cut in equal sizes (e.g., 8 1/2" x 11" in card stock cut into three 3 2/3" x 8 1/2" printed pieces) a significant cost savings can be had. Again, use both sides of the insert whenever possible.

Newsletters/Magazines

Consider producing newsletters, magazines, or other forms of regular communication. These formats enable you to share detailed information and useful tips for readers. They also enable you to maintain ongoing communication, reminding your audience of prevention/mitigation needs and keeping them up-to-date on new developments. There are a number of desktop publishing software programs to assist with design and development, or you may want to consult with a professional communications or advertising agency.

Several **example fact sheets** are available in the Appendix of this guide.



Look into available design options in-house, such as graphic artists and support staff who have publishing software. These resources are available in all federal and most state agencies, and in some larger local fire departments.

The national Firewise Communities program produces "**How To**" **newsletters** for its nationally recognized communities. These newsletters include tips for local cooperation, community mitigation ideas, and updates on program activity and resources.

Promotional Materials

Promotional materials are a marketing tool designed to emphasize a particular subject or event. Materials such as posters, trading cards, activity books, etc., serve as a reminder of the activity to the participant. If there is a high level of retention of these materials by the targeted audience, it can result in an increase in the residual effect of the fire prevention message. Tying your item to your message in a way that relates to your audience will be most effective. A sample list is included below.

Any products for sale using the Smokey Bear image must be licensed. Most of those listed here are available at

www.symbols.gov.

The Symbols Web site also includes fire education materials.

Action Figures
Activity Books
Badges
Balloons
Bats
Bookmarks
Buttons
Calendars
Color Books

Comic Books
Cups
Growth Charts
Hats
Key Tags
Lapel Pins
Note Pads
Pennants
Pens, Pencils
Erasers

Plush Toys
Postcards
Posters
Rally Rags
School Folders
Seat Cushions
Sport Gloves
Sports Balls
Stickers

Sun Visors
Sunglasses
Tattoos
Teacher Guides
Trading Cards
T-Shirts
Wallets
Water Bottles
Wrist Bands

Exhibits and Signage

Exhibits

Exhibits are an excellent visual tool in educating key audiences in certain settings, such as community fairs, trade shows, and other large-scale events. However, creating exhibits can be expensive, time consuming, and do not necessarily meet all education needs. Where in-house exhibit capabilities and experience are lacking, consultation with colleagues who have developed exhibits or professional exhibit design companies is warranted.

Simple exhibits, such as a mannequin dressed in fire gear, are effective and generate a lot of interest and questions. For the subject of wildland fire, simple color photo and video/DVD displays are also very effective in attracting interest, and don't have to be expensive or time-consuming. Collect good photos and video on a regular basis, to be used at opportune times like these displays.

The National Park Service has a design package for a mobile Discovery exhibit unit. Here the National Park Service has sought to develop a portable exhibit that is relatively inexpensive yet meets exhibit design standards. Furthermore, the subject matter can be changed; in the first exhibit module design, wildland fire was the topic. Contact Harpers Ferry Design through the Web site www.nps.gov for further information.

If you are going to be at a large event with high attendance and many other vendors, consider interactive or interpretive displays to help get attention, incorporating video, sound, user participation, etc.

Theme

Perhaps the most critical step is developing the theme. When walking by an exhibit, a person decides in a matter of seconds whether to view the exhibit or pass by. Flashing lights, bright colors, and clever slogans may catch the eye, but have little to do with a person viewing your exhibit. Most exhibits are viewed for about 30 seconds and the viewer moves on. They may stay for a few minutes if they have a question. The **theme and messaging** are what keep a visitor at the exhibit.

An exhibit should have one simple focus that carries throughout the display. Visual themes, echoed in the graphic and structural elements of the exhibit, can quickly identify the exhibitor's offerings and can provide the "hook" to unify the display. A theme can be simple and relate directly to the products and messages on display. Colors and shapes fit well with graphics and product packaging.

Museum and other educational displays often make good use of themes and may be a good source of inspiration for exhibit designers.

Design and Other Considerations

Once the theme is determined, other criteria, such as the nature of the audience, key messages, the size, and budgets should be discussed. Following are other considerations for development of exhibits.

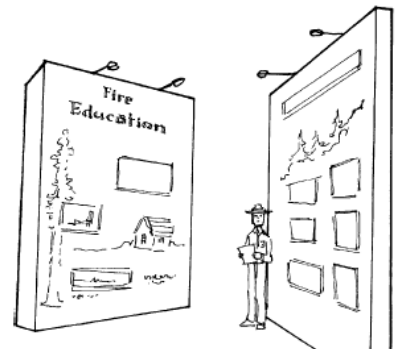
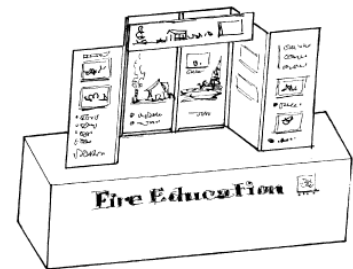
- Design exhibits so visitors can view and comprehend them quickly; minimize text and use attractive graphics. Interactivity by means of computers and other digital media tends to hold visitor attention longer than more static exhibits.
- Caution must be expressed for home-made exhibits. An exhibit reflects the professionalism of the agency. Simply using Velcro to attach photos onto a background may not be desirable.
- Look for alternatives to permanent exhibits unless visitor flow is moderate to heavy and there is a limited number of return visitors. Flexibility is the key to being able to adjust the messages and media to changing issues and audiences.

- For most local community events (county fairs, children's fair, etc.) and convention centers the common booth sizes are 10' x 10' or longer in increments of 10', but usually 10' deep. Other scenarios include a standard table instead of a booth.
- Some of the major negative aspects of exhibits have been the costs of permanent ones or the size and complexity of temporary exhibits and the costs to ship them, as well as the ability to transport them (size, shape).
- If the exhibit is being used at a community affair, convention center, etc., there should be a contract.
- Consider the handouts that visitors will be able to take away from the exhibit. See other sections of this guide for brochures, fact sheets, and other materials.
- There may be opportunities to utilize interactive activities at the exhibit site, such as:
 - CD ROM interactive computer games
 - Computer generated activities
 - Interactive slide presentations
 - Games for client participation
 - Quiz/tests/on-site demonstrations
 - Firefighter/equipment demonstrations

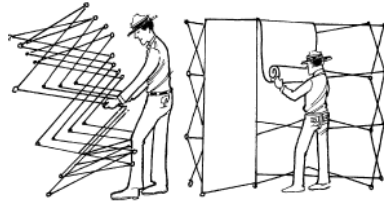


Types of Exhibits

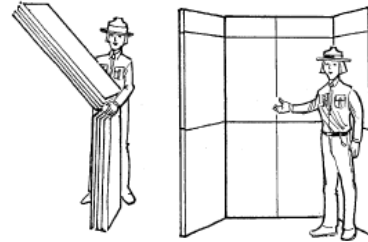
- **Table Throws**, or table cloths with printed emblems, messages, or graphics can be an inexpensive option for a portable exhibit. For example, the Northeast Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designed a table throw with flames along the bottom with the message "Is your home safe from wildfire?" The throw was an eye-catching attractant to the table where educators used a model of home to relay fire prevention messages.
- **Small Exhibits** - Small exhibits are usually contained in less than 400 square feet. Most small exhibits should be based on a single, dynamic theme. Unfortunately, many small exhibitors try to create awareness by crowding the small space with products, personnel, literature, and blow-ups of the agency logo. As a result, the design elements compete for attention, instead of contributing to a central theme. Exhibit designers must carefully select materials that are essential to the design and message.
- **Medium/Large Exhibits** – Exhibits ranging in size from 401 to 1,600 square feet offer the exhibit designer more space to create a striking visual impression. However, a larger area in which to include product displays, demonstration areas, conference rooms, audiovisual presentations, and enlarged graphics puts a greater emphasis on traffic flow and on integrating each design element into a unified marketing concept. Many feature modular units that can be rearranged for other booth configurations, or used separately in smaller exhibit spaces.



- **Modular Exhibits** – Made up of several display components that may be used together or separately. Modules may be freestanding or connect in more than one configuration. Perhaps more attractive to the cost-conscious exhibit designer is that modular units can be customized to a particular audience through the use of interchangeable graphic panels, headers and signs.

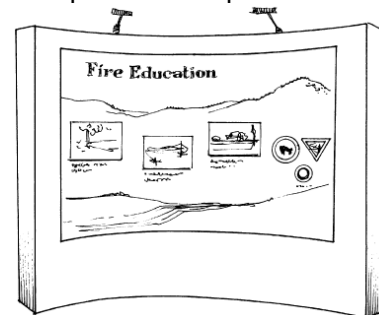


Pop-Up Exhibit



Folding Exhibit

- **Commercial Exhibits** – There are numerous commercial exhibits available. The exhibits range from very simple tabletop types to large convention exhibit designs. This service requires long lead times, so proper planning is essential. Various agencies have professional exhibit design and construction capabilities, or you may consider a professional production vendor.



Virginia Department of Forestry

Temporary Signage

Temporary signs may be in the form of posters and are often seasonal notices. They are normally constructed of short-lived material such as cardboard — many are plastic. They range in size from 11" x 9" items for use on camping or recreation area bulletin boards to large 54" to 44" highway posters. The NWCG [Wildfire Prevention Sign and Poster Guide](http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/pubs/nfes2753/nfes2753.pdf) offers specific guidelines and requirements. Be sure to consult this guide for details.

Posters are ideal ways of getting important messages to the target audience quickly. In most cases they are mounted on pre-existing poster or bulletin boards. Little more is needed than the poster and a staple gun. It is important that outdated posters be promptly removed.

- Use the largest posters (54" x 44") only on high-speed highways (55 mph) and in situations where the scale of the country dwarfs their effect. Use these posters sparingly and place them far enough apart so that they do not appear to be repetitious.
- Use medium-sized posters (42" x 34") on roads with speeds of 40-50 mph. Limit the use of these posters to essential locations. The other medium-sized poster (44" x 16") is to be used on most low-speed, low-volume roads. To extend the use of fire poster mounts for sizes 42" x 34" and 44" x 16" through the off-fire season, other poster messages are available.
- The smaller posters, such as 14" x 12" and 11" x 9", are designed for pedestrian traffic and for trails, campgrounds, trail heads, bulletin boards, roadside rests, and so on. The largest of these generally has adequate visibility and small message content and is suitable for low-speed, low-volume roads where such messages are needed; for example, "No Campfires."

Posters and other signs must be seasonally appropriate. Be sure to remove them after their relevance expires.

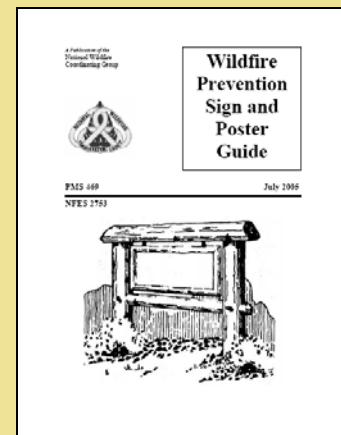
Outdoor Signs

The options of graphic design and layout expand with each new generation of computers and programs. Likewise the technology for production, visual clarity, and durability of outdoor signage are making rapid advances.

Each land management organization has its methods, policies, and means for planning and producing signage for interpretation or education. The NWCG [Wildfire Prevention Sign and Poster Guide](http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/pubs/nfes2753/nfes2753.pdf) offers specific guidelines and requirements. Be sure to consult this guide for details.

Consult the NWCG Wildfire Prevention Sign and Poster Guide for specific requirements and guidelines for posters and outdoor signs.

www.nwcg.gov/pms/pubs/nfes2753/nfes2753.pdf



Most encourage adhering to the following guidelines:

- Meet a communication objective
- Use concise wording
- Make it highly visual
- Make it high quality
- Make it durable
- Ensure it has limited intrusion on the landscape, physically and visually

The National Association for Interpretation (www.interpnet.com) publishes a partial list of companies available to assist with signage. Also, local sign and graphic design firms may be able to assist. Regardless of who actually produces the sign, the ultimate responsibility for crafting the message text and selecting visuals rests with the agency.

General Requirements

Fire communication signs and posters must be designed, installed and maintained to achieve the important goals of effectively conveying a specific message while portraying a positive agency image. To be effective, signs and posters should:

- Convey the proper message(s) for the location. Make sure signs are up-to-date and appropriate.
- Convey a clear, positive, friendly, and simple message(s).
- Avoid areas full of “No” and “Do Not” messages and areas where there are too many signs/posters with conflicting messages, etc.
- Command attention and generate respect for the agency and the environment. Never post signs on trees, fence posts, etc.
- Display signs and posters on proper and well-maintained mounts. Keep sign and poster mountings in good condition and clear of vegetation and clutter. Promptly replace signs and posters that are worn or damaged.
- In order to achieve optimum readability, sign and poster sizes will vary depending on the speed, if any, the viewer is expected to be traveling as he or she moves past the sign and the distance between the sign and the viewer. Adjusting the size of the lettering is the most common method of achieving readability.
- Signs should be maintained to ensure they can be easily read in both day and night hours. Replace or repair signs that have been defaced or when the lettering has been marred. Remove or cover signs when they are no longer needed or when the message is no longer applicable and timely. For instance, wildfire prevention signs left out during winter portray a disorganized agency and careless image. The effect of these messages is lost. In addition to maintaining the sign itself, remove weeds, brush, and other obstacles that obstruct the visibility of the sign or detract from the message and a positive agency image.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are a relatively inexpensive alternative to paid advertising. Developed in the style of an advertisement, media run them free of charge. Because airwaves are public, radio and television stations are required to ensure their programming airs in the public interest. Running PSAs helps them fulfill this need. Typical radio or television PSAs run in lengths of 15-, 30- or 60-second spots. Many newspapers and magazines also run print PSAs, and some outdoor advertisers may be willing to provide free or discounted billboards.

The [Ad Council](#) provides Smokey Bear PSAs through the Cooperative Forest Fire Protection program. Individual states do not incur additional cost for these PSAs. In addition, several states have produced regional and local PSAs, such as [Florida Division of Forestry](#) and the [Alabama Forestry Commission](#).

There are many reasons to write a PSA for your wildland fire message, including prevention strategies, current fire warnings, and notification of upcoming events in the community regarding wildland fire education and mitigation. Your communication plan should include the types of messages your agency wishes to convey, and plan accordingly, taking unexpected events into consideration. Following are some helpful tips to aid in this process, many of which can be applied to television, radio, print, and outdoor.

- Different radio stations have different requirements for PSA writing and submittal. Therefore, calling the station in advance for such requirements is an appropriate first step. When you call, ask who oversees PSAs and try to speak with that person directly.
- One basic rule for writing PSAs for radio is “tell them what you are going to tell them . . . tell them . . . tell them you told them.”
- When submitting the copy of your PSA to a radio station, your job is to make it as clear and easy to read as possible, as on-air talent will usually be the ones to deliver your message. To aid in this process, type your copy, either double or triple-spaced, on one side of the paper, leaving generous margins.
- In writing your PSA for radio, keep the text brief and accurate, while capturing listeners' attention and motivating the audience. (Fazio and Gilbert, 1982).
- You may use nontraditional punctuation in your radio or television PSA copy, making it easier for on-air talent to read aloud. For example, using dashes (—) and dots (. . .) can indicate to the reader when pauses should be inserted into the dialogue. (Fazio and Gilbert, 1982).
- Sound effects, if used appropriately, can enhance the PSA and capture listener attention, after all, “radio is sound” (Fazio and Gilbert, 1982). For example, the sounds of forests burning have been used in the Smokey Bear campaign (Fazio and Gilbert, 1982).
- A criterion used to select PSAs is relevance to the local community (Fazio and Gilbert, 1982); therefore, if your fire message is relevant to your local area, this might increase the chances of selection.

Television PSAs

Television PSAs can range from silent, on-screen community calendar announcements to color slides with voice-overs, to pre-produced videotapes.

- Television stations can develop on-screen calendar announcements for your special events if you give them a fact sheet that provides basic information (who, what, when, where, why, and how). You can also send camera-ready artwork of a logo and slogan for their use.
- Color slides are another option that can make the television station's job easier. A single slide may contain basic information and a graphic of a logo and slogan. Send the slide with a 10-second script.

- You may also provide a produced videotape PSA. Contact your agency Public Affairs or Public Information Office to see whether they have the capability to help you produce one.
- If you do submit a produced videotape, send a written transcript of the PSA to help the station staff who will preview it.

Advertising

Paid advertising is the only way to ensure the time and date your message is carried through the media, as well as the content of the message itself. News media (earned media) will write their own stories and may change the content of your message. And PSAs may be aired at any given time of day, often in the late night hours. However, paid advertising may require significant financial commitment. Weigh the advantages and disadvantages of this marketing tool carefully.

Be sure to consult your agency's policy on paid advertising. Paid advertising may be inappropriate for some tax-funded agencies. If you would still like to explore this vehicle, consider partnering with a relevant private organization to fund the project.

<u>Advantages</u>		<u>Disadvantages</u>
Newspapers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flexible and timely ▪ Intense coverage of local markets ▪ Broad acceptance and use ▪ High believability of printed word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Short life ▪ Read hastily ▪ Small "pass-along" audience ▪ Declining readership
Television	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Combination of sight, sound, and motion ▪ Appeals to senses ▪ Mass audience coverage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-selectivity of audience ▪ Fleeting impressions ▪ Short life ▪ Expensive
Radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mass use (over 25 million radios sold annually) ▪ Audience selectivity via station format ▪ Low cost (per unit of time) ▪ Geographic flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Audio presentation only ▪ Less attention than television ▪ Short life
Magazines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High geographic and demographic selectivity ▪ Quality of reproduction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long closing periods (6 to 8 weeks prior to publication) ▪ No guarantee of position (unless premium is paid)
Outdoor (e.g. billboards)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flexible ▪ Relative absence of competing advertisements ▪ Repeat exposure ▪ Relatively inexpensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creative limitations ▪ Many distractions for viewer ▪ Public attack (ecological implications) ▪ No selectivity of audience
Direct Mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Audience selectivity ▪ Flexible ▪ No competition from other advertisements ▪ Personalized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relatively high cost ▪ Consumers often pay little attention and throw it away

Billboards

Billboards have long been used as part of the Smokey Bear campaign, as well as other prevention and education efforts. Many of the guidelines follow the Sign Guide mentioned earlier in this section.

According to the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (www.oaaa.org):



Outdoor advertising is an important communications medium in an increasingly mobile society. Businesses communicate with customers. Candidates reach voters. Police track criminals. Charities advance the greater public good.

Since the early days of the traveling circus, outdoor advertising has promoted commerce and helped guide travelers to their destinations. Outdoor advertising is a growing industry with a bright future because:

- Consumers spend increasingly more time away from home.
- Technology continues to improve the outdoor advertising medium.
- Other media (print and broadcast) have declining audiences due to media fragmentation.

