



Community Mitigation Assessment Teams Promote Action



The United States Forest Service has a program that can help communities reduce their vulnerability to wildfire disasters. The assistance comes in the form of a Community Mitigation Assessment Team (CMAT), which is typically activated while there is still “smoke in the air.”

The help they provide is substantial and intense but only available to communities that commit to taking part and taking action. Here are what they call their Enabling Conditions:

1. There must be a viable local coalition with a history of mitigation activities (e.g. fuel reduction programs, Firewise education, etc.);
2. The Forest Service must have a pre-existing working relationship with the community or coalition;
3. There must be an identifiable need and likelihood that any mitigation projects will be successfully completed;

4. All partners involved must be willing and able to work with the Team;
5. The Forest Service must provide logistical support to the team; The team’s work must be wildfire mitigation related, preferably with smoke in the air.

If a CMAT is activated, here is what they say the community should expect:

The team is a high-functioning group of subject matter experts. The work is intense, and the team expects significant participation by the host community and partners. We expect daily interaction and availability of all partners in the process. We cannot tell you what you need to do, rather we work with you to act. At a minimum expect the following:

1. In-briefing meeting;
2. CMAT facilitated meetings and workshops;

3. Breakaway interviews;
4. Time to share best management practices, tours and site visits.

We expect the host community to provide, at a minimum the following:

1. Situational Analysis (All requesting communities will be asked to participate in a community analysis);
2. Contact lists, maps, documents and background infor-



mation.

Based on the enabling conditions and resources provided, CMAT will re-view your community’s need to evaluate if we can lend a hand. There are no guarantees, but we will do our best to help.

A thoughtful participant in a CMAT activation shared these thoughts:

“The recommendations included an assessment of where to build and how to build so that our communities won’t be put in harm’s way. We must ensure that homeowners understand that living and building in the WUI means that their homes could become tinderboxes when fire encroaches. While I still believe that the burden for action and property protection ultimately falls on the homeowner, the responsibility to take action falls upon everyone, and we must all be willing to take accountability and ownership over our communities. That includes property owners, local officials, land managers, and people like me who want to ensure safe and healthy communities. Wildfire issues, as well as many other environmental and societal challenges, are far too large to be solved by a single individual, office, or agency. We must be willing to accept that global problems are problems for all of us, and that solutions are possible when – and only when – we address these issues together.

Order a C-MAT before an incident if:

The Forest/Ranger District or community anticipate wildfire risk during the coming season.

Order a C-MAT during an incident if:

The local forest cannot provide mitigation outreach to the local community to take advantage of the teachable moment;

The wildfire is expected to threaten structures within 7-14 days;

Structure protection is ordered or being used;

There is need for pre-fire mitigation assistance in highest risk (first tier) communities at imminent threat;

There is need for pre-fire mitigation assistance in high risk (second tier) communities at less threat;

Pre-fire mitigation training and assistance could help the community and the Forest;

Incident Management Team needs regarding fire adaptation practices, community engagement, and coalition building can’t be met with existing capacity or resources;

Community mitigation/fire adaptation opportunities during the incident would benefit the IMT, Forest and local community.

Order a C-MAT after an incident if there is:

Continued need for mitigation assistance;

An opportunity to build or strengthen local capacity for mitigation education or actions;

Need to support local organizations in developing mitigation plans or strategies;

Opportunity to strengthen mitigation partnerships, coalitions, or networks.

More information:

Community Mitigation Assessment Team:

<https://communitymitigationassistanceteam.wordpress.com/>

Publication on overcoming barriers to mitigation action:

<https://communitymitigationassistanceteam.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/barriersfinal.pdf>

U.S. Forest Service

<https://www.fs.fed.us>