

# UNACCEPTABLE RISK

## FIREFIGHTERS ON THE FRONT LINES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

We've found that *Unacceptable Risk* sparks great dialogue, but a few strategic questions from the screening host can get the conversation moving in a good direction. We offer the following to help you guide the discussion and create a focus on the connections between wildfire and climate change.

1. What parts of the film made the biggest impression on you? Why?
2. Have you noticed evidence of a changing fire environment in your area? How about in Colorado or the broader Western United States? What are some of the changes you have observed?
3. What do you know about the relationship between climate change and the growing intensity and frequency of wildfires? What would you like to know? (The following pages contain a list of information and resources that show the links between climate change and wildfire risk).
4. In the short term, mitigation efforts are a key defense against the impact of wildland fires. How is our community approaching mitigation? What are we doing well? How could we improve?
5. In a recent report, the Union of Concerned Scientists says, "Adaptation measures, however, have their limits... Ultimately, cutting carbon emissions to slow climate change and temperature increases will be crucial to help curtail the impacts of wildfires on people and forests."<sup>1</sup> What are some ways in which your community and the state of Colorado are addressing climate change? Are we doing enough?
6. In the film, firefighter Don Whittemore says, "You have to say, yes, there is evidence of climate change in the fire environment". He goes on to say, "As a society we've got to start taking this evidence seriously, and we've got to start confronting climate change." Do you feel that leaders in your community and/or the state are taking this evidence seriously?
7. One important effort to curb carbon emissions is the EPA's proposed Clean Power Plan. Are you familiar with the plan? What have you heard in the media about the Clean Power Plan? (The next page contains background on the Clean Power Plan and links to more detailed information sheets).

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ucsusa.org/global\\_warming/science\\_and\\_impacts/impacts/climate-change-development-patterns-wildfire-costs.html#.VWdtf0J0zGI](http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science_and_impacts/impacts/climate-change-development-patterns-wildfire-costs.html#.VWdtf0J0zGI)

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### BETTER PREPARING YOUR HOME AND COMMUNITY FOR WILDFIRE RISK

#### Firewise Communities Program

This program encourages local solutions for safety by involving homeowners in taking individual responsibility for protecting their homes from the risk of wildfire. The program teaches people how to adapt to living with wildfire and encourages neighbors to work together and take action now to prevent losses.

#### Fire Adapted Communities

The Fire Adapted Communities website offers information and specific actions you can take, no matter what your role, to reduce your risk to the next wildfire.

### MAKING THE CONNECTION: The science linking increased wildfire risk and climate change.

Firefighters see that the fire environment is changing, becoming more dangerous as fires become more frequent and more intense. Studies from a number of different sources tell us that the warming climate is one of the root causes of this dangerous shift. The following are highlights from select publications:

“Increased warming, drought, and insect outbreaks, all caused by or linked to climate change, have increased wildfires and impacts to people and ecosystems in the Southwest. Fire models project more wildfire and increased risks to communities across extensive areas.”

Source: [National Climate Assessment Highlights](#)

“The western wildfire season has grown from five months on average in the 1970s to seven months today. The annual number of large wildfires has increased by more than 75 percent.”

Source: [Playing with Fire- Report by Union of Concerned Scientists](#)

“The threat of wildfires is projected to worsen over time as rising temperatures lead to more frequent, large, and severe wildfires and longer fire seasons.”

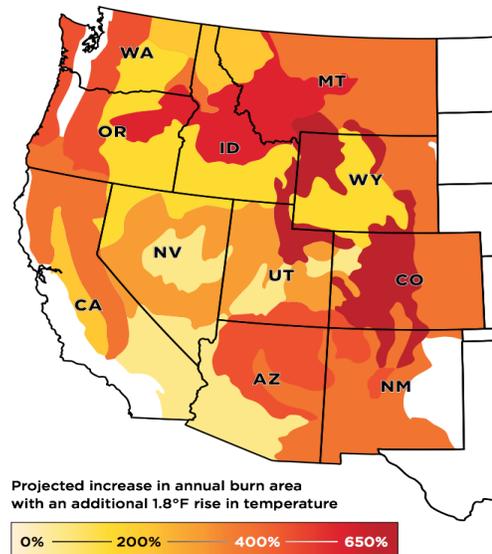
Source: [Playing with Fire- Report by Union of Concerned Scientists](#)

“Since 1970, regional temperatures have increased by 1.9 degrees Fahrenheit. By mid-century, temperatures are expected to increase an additional 2.5 to 6.5 degrees Fahrenheit.”

Source: [Playing with Fire- Report by Union of Concerned Scientists](#)

#### Western Wildfires and Climate Change Infographic from Union of Concerned Scientists

FIGURE 1. Midcentury Increase in Area Burned by Wildfires in the Western United States



One study shows that for every additional 1.8°F (1°C) increase in temperature, much of the western United States will experience a significant increase in the area burned by wildfires. Colorado faces the highest overall increase in risk, with a potential increase in annual burned area of 400 to 650 percent. By mid-century, however, temperatures in the western United States are projected to far exceed this estimate, increasing another 2.5°F to 6.5°F over today's temperatures due to heat-trapping emissions from human activities. This would make the area even more vulnerable to wildfire damage.

SOURCE: UCS 2013; NRC 2011.

Source: [Playing with Fire- Report by Union of Concerned Scientists](#)

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### THE EPA CLEAN POWER PLAN WHAT IS IT AND HOW WILL IT REDUCE CARBON EMISSIONS?

The Clean Power Plan is an EPA rule, likely to be finalized in Summer 2015, which will reduce carbon pollution from the power sector. The rule is designed to provide flexibility to states and utilities in reducing these emissions in ways that meet the diverse needs in different locations.

“Power plants are the largest source of carbon pollution in the U.S., accounting for roughly one-third of all domestic greenhouse gas emissions.”<sup>2</sup> Currently there are no limits on carbon pollution from power plants, even though they are the single biggest source in the United States. This new rule from the EPA would change that.

States will be able to choose how they meet their goals for decreasing carbon pollution. “They have up to two or three years to submit final plans depending on whether they work alone or in partnership with other states and up to 15 years for full implementation of all emission reduction measures, after the proposed Clean Power Plan is finalized.”<sup>3</sup>

**Colorado is already a Leader in Renewable Energy and will thrive under the Clean Power Plan**  
Coloradans support setting sensible carbon pollution standards that protect health, the environment, and the economy.<sup>4</sup>

Colorado has led the way in reducing carbon pollution. Efforts in the last decade have positioned the state well to continue leadership as the new standards are created.

- In 2004 Colorado voters adopted Amendment 37, establishing the country’s first citizen-initiated renewable energy standard requiring the largest utilities in the state to obtain 10% of their electric energy from clean, renewable resources by 2015.
- In 2007, 2010, and 2013 the Colorado Legislature boosted Colorado’s renewable energy standard to 30% by 2020 for our largest utilities and 20% by 2020 for rural Colorado.
- In 2010, to address deteriorating air quality along the Front-Range, business leaders, policy makers, and citizens across Colorado developed the Clean Air, Clean Jobs Act to reduce pollution from power plants and protect public health.

[For More Detailed Information on the Clean Power Plan check out this fact sheet from the EPA.](#)

<sup>2</sup> From EPA’s Fact Sheet: Clean Power Plan Overview <http://www2.epa.gov/carbon-pollution-standards/fact-sheet-clean-power-plan-overview>

<sup>3</sup> From EPA’s Fact Sheet: Clean Power Plan State Roles <http://www2.epa.gov/carbon-pollution-standards/fact-sheet-clean-power-plan-state-roles>

<sup>4</sup> Americans’ Views on Environmental Regulations – December 2014 – Hart Research/American Viewpoint for NRDC  
[http://docs.nrdc.org/legislation/files/leg\\_15012201a.pdf](http://docs.nrdc.org/legislation/files/leg_15012201a.pdf)

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### TAKE ACTION – SUPPORT THE CLEAN POWER PLAN

We can decrease Unacceptable Risks facing our firefighters and communities over the long term by acting on climate change today. Here's how audiences can show their support for the Clean Power Plan (CPP), which will help reduce carbon emissions:

- Tweet and/or make Facebook posts supporting the CPP. Be sure to tag the film @FireClimateDoc and CO decision makers: @hickforco, @SenBennetCO @CoryGardner. Use hashtags #ActOnClimate and #UnacceptableRisk
- Set up a social media photo booth. You can print out [this image](#). Take pictures of audience members holding the image and then have them tweet out the pictures of themselves along with messages like these:
  - @hickforco I support the EPA #CleanPowerPlan and CO's #cleanenergy solutions #Unacceptable Risk #ActonClimate
  - I stand with firefighters. I stand for the EPA's #CleanPowerPlan" #Unacceptable Risk @FireClimateDoc @hickforco
  - Wildfire & climate change: Make the connection. Keep CO a leader in renewables #CleanPowerPlan #UnacceptableRisk @FireClimateDoc @hickforco
- Write Letters to the Editor in support of the CPP. Ask audience members to pledge to write a letter to the editor within a week following the screening.