

# Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry

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## Firewood media recommendations

DURHAM, N.H.--Here are some timely suggestions and recommendations to consider to help you gain some firewood-related coverage in your respective states.

For many people, Memorial Day weekend is the unofficial kickoff of camping season. The Fourth of July and Labor Day are also major holidays with lots of outdoor recreation. Consider timing your media relations efforts so that news coverage appears just before the start of the holiday weekends. If you do your interview early, ask the reporter to hold on to the story before airing or publishing it until a couple days before the holiday weekend, if possible. If you wait until the holiday weekend to air the stories, most campers will be already gone by then, and you will miss the optimal window of opportunity to communicate the message.

The weeks before the holidays would be considered optimal timing for media coverage on this topic. With that aside, though, positive firewood coverage *anytime* is preferable to none.

Next, decide what you want to say about the issue before you say it. During a live TV interview is the wrong time to figure out what to talk about. Before the interview, develop three key messages that tell the gist of the issue, what is being done about it and how people who normally move firewood can help resolve the problem. Each key message should be short and concise, no more than 5-10 seconds long. Back up your key messages with supporting facts. Practice using your key messages and facts before the interview.

Anticipate reporters' questions beforehand, particularly the tough ones. Prepare questions and responses in advance and practice using them. However, do not look at your notes during the interview.

During the interview, stick to your key messages and facts and don't go off course; there lies danger. Do not speculate, guess, or respond to hypothetical questions. Instead, reiterate your key messages and facts as appropriate.

Remember, the entire time you remain with the reporter you are "on the record". That means anything you say or do could be used against you, potentially. You could do a great 20-minute interview with a reporter and make one verbal slip walking with them back to your car, and that slip could change the entire focus of the story.

Realize you won't have the answers to every question, no matter how hard you try. Saying "I don't know" is often OK if you don't know the answer. If a reporter asks a question you don't have an answer for, tell them you will find out and get back to them. Then follow up.

However, some questions can't be avoided without looking evasive. For instance, if a reporter asks you how campers are expected to afford buying high-priced local firewood to keep from bringing it from home, you should have a well thought out answer ready. Reporters will expect you to have that answer.

Contact your local newspaper's environmental editor or reporter at least two to three weeks prior to the start of the holiday weekends to pitch a firewood story. Provide an update of your state efforts to date to communicate the issue. Examples are campground conferences, radio talk shows, brochures, flyers, posters, presentations, bookmarks, rack cards, Web site notices, on-line reservation company partnerships, surveys, ongoing research, etc.

Tie in your story pitch to the kickoff of camping season. That will help to give the topic a news hook. News hooks give the story an element of timing. Tell the reporter you are hoping to get the message out before the kickoff of camping season to give people an opportunity to reconsider moving firewood long distances.

If you decide you would like to do a TV interview, remember most of the information viewers take in will be visual. Look sharp. Consider wearing a uniform if one is available. Otherwise, dress appropriately for the circumstances. Practice doing your interview beforehand. Determine which visuals might be useful to help tell the story (images or video of insects, locations for shooting, graphs, etc.). Remember your facial expressions need to match your verbal tones. If you sound confident but look nervous, people will notice.

Public radio and news radio stations might also be interested in covering the story. The coverage might range from a short news interview to a lengthy call-in talk show. Contact the station's news director to pitch the story and set up the interview.

Remember, during a live interview you have only one opportunity to get the message right. This goes for both radio and TV interviews. If you make a mistake, correct your statement quickly and go on without pausing. On the other hand, if you mess up during a taped interview, you can often ask to restart what you wanted to say. Check with the reporter to see if the interview is live or taped before the interview starts.

If you want to improve your chances of a particular message getting published or aired, perk up your volume slightly and use your hands to stress the point. Repeat the message as appropriate during the interview when possible.

Consider partnering with your respective state campground association executive director to jointly release the message about leaving firewood at home. We received a strong show of support recently from the Northeast Campground Association, as well as state campground associations and campground owners. Your state camping association executive director might be eager to help communicate the issue. Showing both a forest health manager and a campground association leader together indicates solidarity on the issue.

You might also want to do a joint interview with a Forest Service or Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service spokesperson to compare and contrast state and regional-level concerns.

Another angle would be to show how research is sometimes being used on the front lines of forest health issues. Recent examples include how the emerald ash borer wasps are being used to monitor EAB spread, as well as parasites from Idaho to combat the hemlock woolly adelgid.

There are several different ways you can release information. Some of the more common methods include news releases, photos, videos, interviews, speeches, OpEds, etc.

A less frequently used method is called a media availability. It is in some ways simply a planned opportunity to meet with the news media to check out your issue, in this case, firewood. Conduct a media availability only if there is no other appropriate means to get the message out separately to the media. For example, conducting a live demonstration (jumping a canyon on a motorcycle) might be a good time for a media availability. You would not want to do the same demonstration 5-10 times for individual reporters.

However, if you do not have a pressing need to talk with everyone at once, and you have nothing time critical to show them, the preferred method is to do individual media interviews separately.

Organizations typically announce a media availability by disseminating a media advisory. It is formatted much like a news release, but it serves a different purpose. A media advisory is written to notify the media about an upcoming event. Conversely, a news release is written for the public to read. So word your advisories and releases accordingly.

Consider holding a media availability for local news media at a spot in the woods or in or near a campground showing obvious signs of invasive insect-related defoliation and/or mortality (recommended by Associated Press).

One goal of a firewood media availability would be to show the real-world damage that invasive insects inflict on forests. If you don't have much tree defoliation or mortality to point to, do not hold a media availability in a healthy forested spot unless you have something else to show them.

You can send off the announcement of a media availability either through AP or directly through individual media outlets in your area. Consider as part of your presentation doing a live demonstration cutting away bark from a firewood log, showing the types of insects found underneath tree bark. Don't cut yourself. You can try other types of presentations as well. For example, Kyle Lombard with the N.H. Division of Forests and Lands has firewood in drums that he might use to show how insects can emerge months after the firewood has been moved.

Nearly all media outlets prefer to receive news releases and media advisories via email today. Write your news release or media advisory email text with short, simple sentences and words. Avoid technical jargon and acronyms. Send the email directly to the reporter or editor and do not use attachments. Many media outlets automatically block emails with attachments to avoid filling up their inboxes. Links are often OK, though.

If you don't have an imminent threat of EAB to discuss, talk about the invasive species in your state that *are* already causing problems for local forests. Remember, moving firewood long distances also spreads diseases.

Keep in mind that if you say moving firewood is a big problem, the reporter will typically seek out other people whose opinions either confirm or refute your claim. Don't be surprised if the story that's published or aired shows a range of opinions on

the issue. That is to be expected. Also expect the reporter to talk with one or more campers or other people who haul firewood.

If you would like more information or recommendations for increasing your potential for media coverage, contact USFS Northeastern Area Public Affairs Specialist Glenn Rosenholm at 603-880-6325 or at [grosenholm@fs.fed.us](mailto:grosenholm@fs.fed.us).

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