

JOSEPHINE COUNTY INTEGRATED FIRE PLAN  
LESSONS LEARNED: WOODY VEGETATION DISPOSAL DAY IN  
SOUTHWESTERN OREGON

MAY 2005

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The first annual Woody Vegetation Disposal Day occurred in Southwestern Oregon on April 16, 2005. The event gave participants an opportunity to dispose of their woody vegetation for free. Josephine County's event was held at JO-GRO Composting Center. In Jackson County three sites accepted material: Evans Valley Fire District #6 (Wimer), Agate Lake Station (FD#3), and Fire District #5 in Talent.

Event sponsors included Jackson and Josephine Counties, the Josephine County Integrated Fire Plan, the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, the Oregon Department of Forestry, Rural/Metro Fire Department, the City of Grants Pass, the Grants Pass Department of Public Safety, Jackson and Josephine County Fire Districts and the Rogue Valley Fire Prevention Cooperative.

During the course of the event, organizers collected a total of 448 cubic yards of debris from 193 customers. In addition, participants completed a total of 115 questionnaires. The content and results of the questionnaires are detailed in this report.

## **Questionnaire Methodology**

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In order to inform future debris day planning efforts, organizers asked participants of the Woody Vegetation Disposal Day to complete a short questionnaire. The questionnaires sought to understand the motivation and level of awareness of participants. They included questions about demographics, the reasons participants had for bringing in debris, and perceptions of wildfire risk. Sponsoring agencies worked together to form the questions. Additionally, some questions were adapted from a fire plan survey done in the Applegate Fire District.

Volunteers working at each of the drop-off stations asked participants to complete questionnaires before or after they had dropped off their vegetation. Some participants chose to fill out the questionnaires themselves and other questionnaires were directly administered by volunteers.

Resource Innovations at the University of Oregon entered responses from the Josephine County questionnaire into SPSS and ran frequencies and Crosstabs to identify the percentages for each response. Percentages reported for Josephine County in this document are valid percentages, calculated based on the number of actual responses to each question.

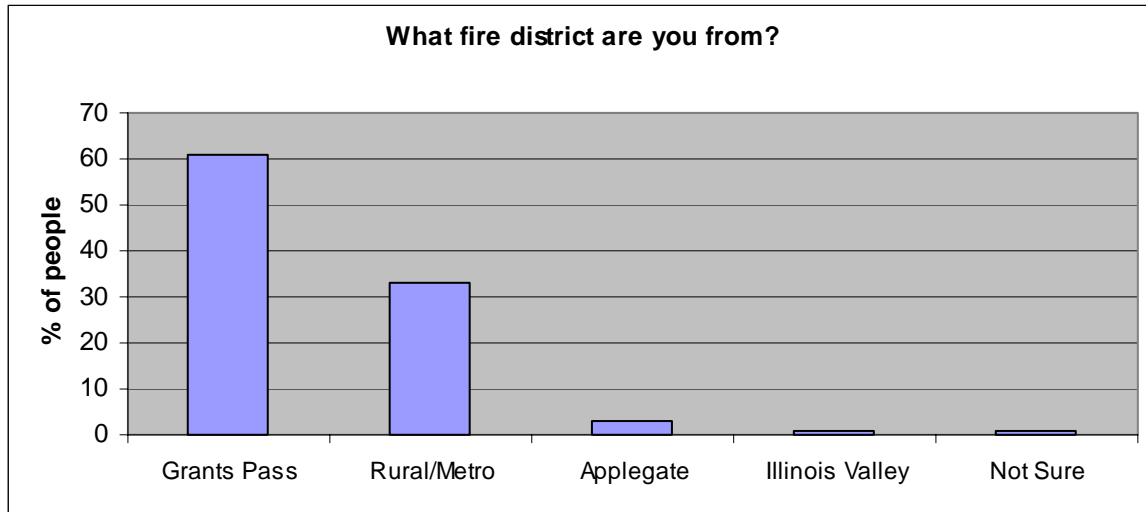
Jackson County totaled their questionnaire responses and entered the information into an Excel spreadsheet in order to identify percentages for each response. Percentages given for Jackson County responses, therefore, are estimated rather than valid.

## **Josephine County Results**

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Josephine County collected a total of 338 cubic yards of debris from 143 customers. This is about twice the amount of traffic that JO-GRO typically receives on a Saturday. Eighty-eight people completed questionnaires at JO-GRO, with the majority of participants (66%) coming from Grants Pass. Of those who listed a specific region in Grants Pass, 11% came from the Northeast, 10% came from the Northwest, 5.7% came from the Southeast and 6.8% came from the Southwest. Table 1 illustrates the geographic representation of people who came to the event.

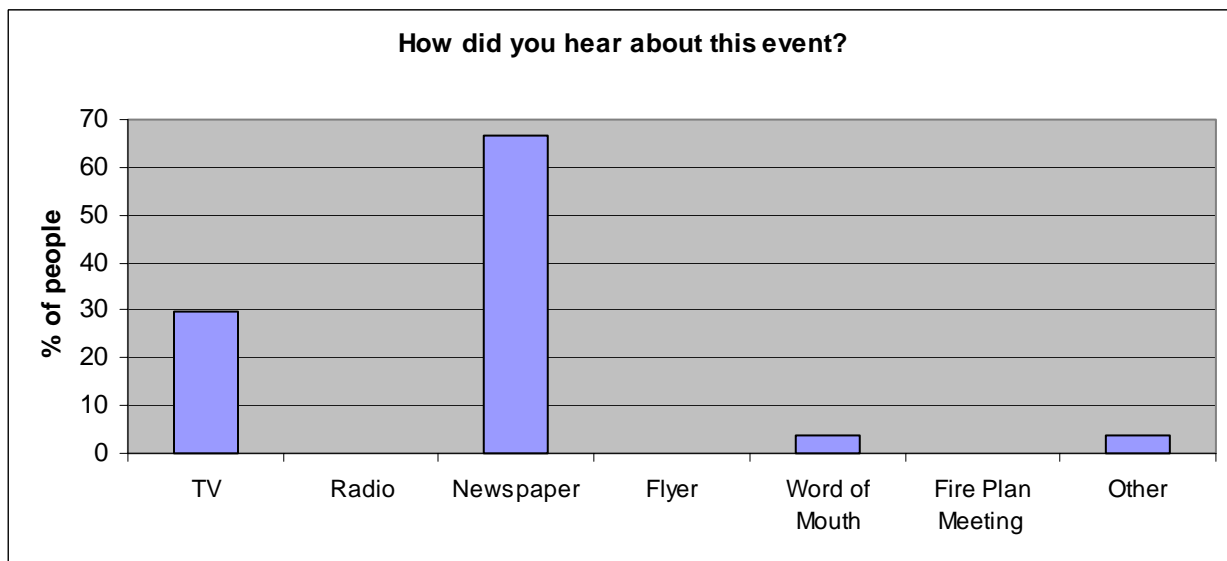
**Table 1. Fire District Representation of Participants**



Results show that over 36% of the respondents have lived in the county for over twenty years and 25% have lived in the county for 11-20 years. Interestingly, 2% of those questioned indicated that they did not live in Josephine County but drove there in order to drop-off woody vegetation.

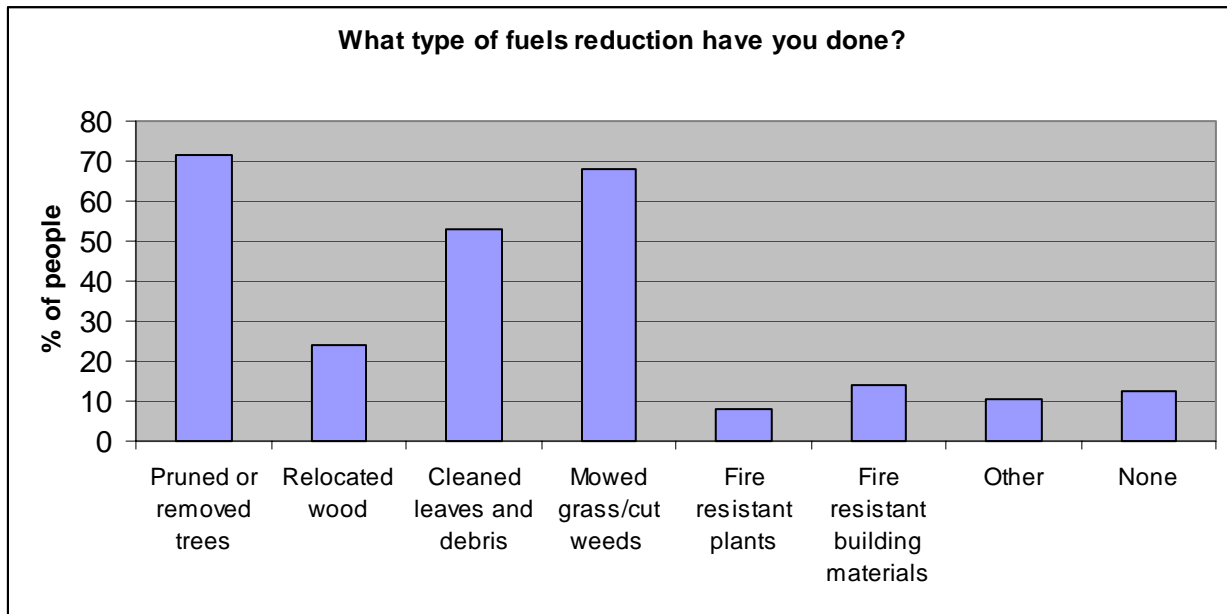
People learned of the Woody Vegetation Disposal Day in a variety of ways. When asked "How did you hear about this event?" all but one person responded and a number of people checked more than one box on the questionnaire. Of these replies, most indicated that they had heard about the event through newspaper coverage (40%). A smaller percentage had heard about the event from radio, television reports or fire plan meetings and some heard through word of mouth. Almost half of the respondents chose "other" when asked how they had learned of the event. Of this group of respondents, 80% were completely unaware that the event was happening. Table 2 shows how participants learned about the event.

**Table 2. Josephine County Event Marketing**



Only one person did not answer the question “What kind of fuels reduction or defensible space treatments have you done?” and many marked more than one choice. Respondents indicated that the most common types of fuels reduction performed included pruning/removing trees, cleaning leaves, pine needles, debris from roof, gutters and yard, and/or that they mowed grass/cut weeds regularly. A smaller percentage of people said that they used fire resistant vegetation or building materials. “Other” responses included “cutting dead wood,” “fire lines,” “cleaned chimney,” “forest service came out” and “n/a – live in town.” Additionally, 12.6% of respondents reported that they have not done any defensible space treatments. Table 3 illustrates the types of fuel reduction done by percentage of people.

**Table 3. Fuels Reduction efforts**



When asked “What motivated you to bring your woody vegetation in today?” 97% of people responded. Again, participants often chose more than one response to the question. Some people (19.8%) indicated concern with “high wildfire risk in Josephine County,” 15.1% were concerned that “2005 may be a severe fire season,” and 16.3% “saw information about creating defensible space.” A very large percentage (70.9%) chose “other,” and gave a wide assortment of reasons. The top two reasons given were “cleanup” and the fact that it was a “free” drop-off day. Other specific reasons included: “recycle,” “had a load,” “nowhere else to go,” “always bring it here,” and “landscaping business.”

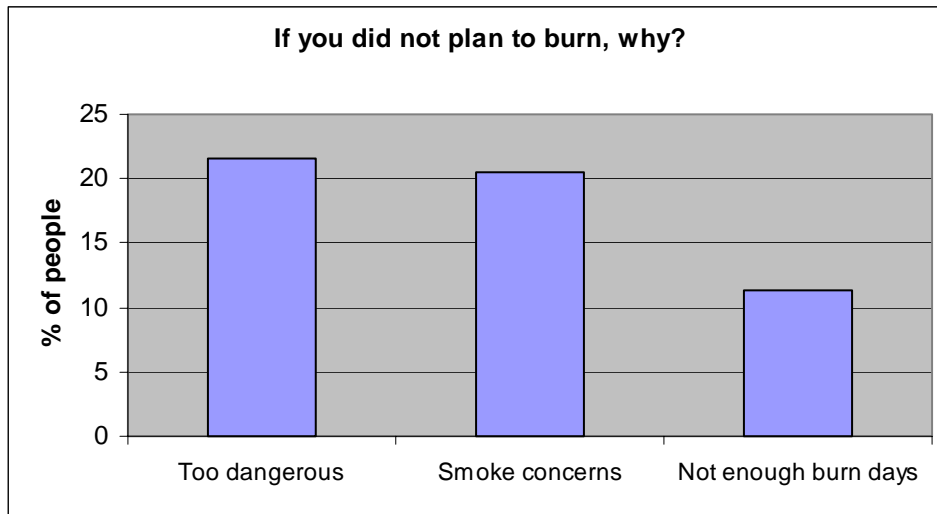
Despite the increased traffic by virtue of it being a free drop-off day, an overwhelming majority (89.5%) of the responses to “Would you have brought your woody vegetation to JO-GRO if there were not a free-drop off day?” were affirmative. Only two people did not answer this question.

Eighty-five percent of people responded to the question “What else might you have done with your woody vegetation?” Some people chose more than one response. Of those who responded, 40% said that they would have burned the debris. Of these, 17% were from Grants Pass and 20% receive services from Rural/Metro. Eight percent of the total respondents said they would have chipped their debris. Over half of respondents chose

"other" as a response for reasons, including that they would bring it to JO-GRO, they would do "nothing" with it or that the question was "not applicable" to their situation. A common theme in these particular responses was that individuals did not think they were at risk of fire if they lived within city limits. Of the 14.6% of people who reported not being concerned, all were from Grants Pass.

The respondents that did not plan to burn their woody debris considered burning "too dangerous," (24%) and were concerned about smoke (22.8%). A third of respondents wrote in comments that they "just don't burn," "rather recycle," "takes too long," and "easier to bring to JO-GRO." Table 4 shows respondents' reasoning for not burning woody debris.

**Table 4. Concerns about burning**

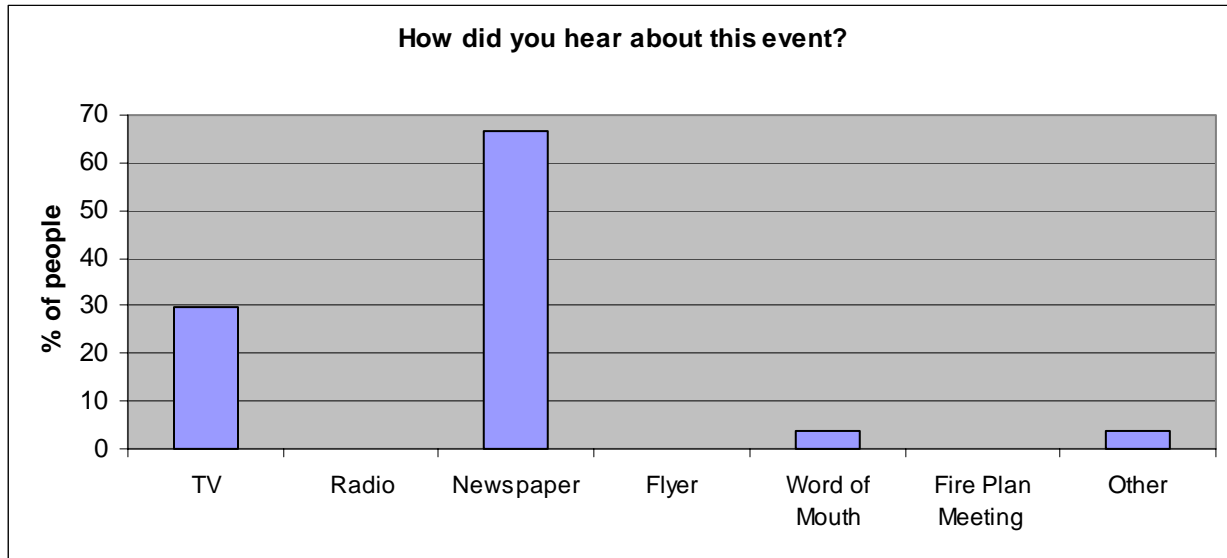


Ninety-four percent of people responded to the question, "Why have you done defensible space? Check all that apply." Of these, the top three motivations were "personal safety concerns," (48.2%) "home/property protection," (56.6%) and "visual appearance" (59%). "Other" responses included "forest service grant," "live in town," and "home maintenance."

### Jackson County Results

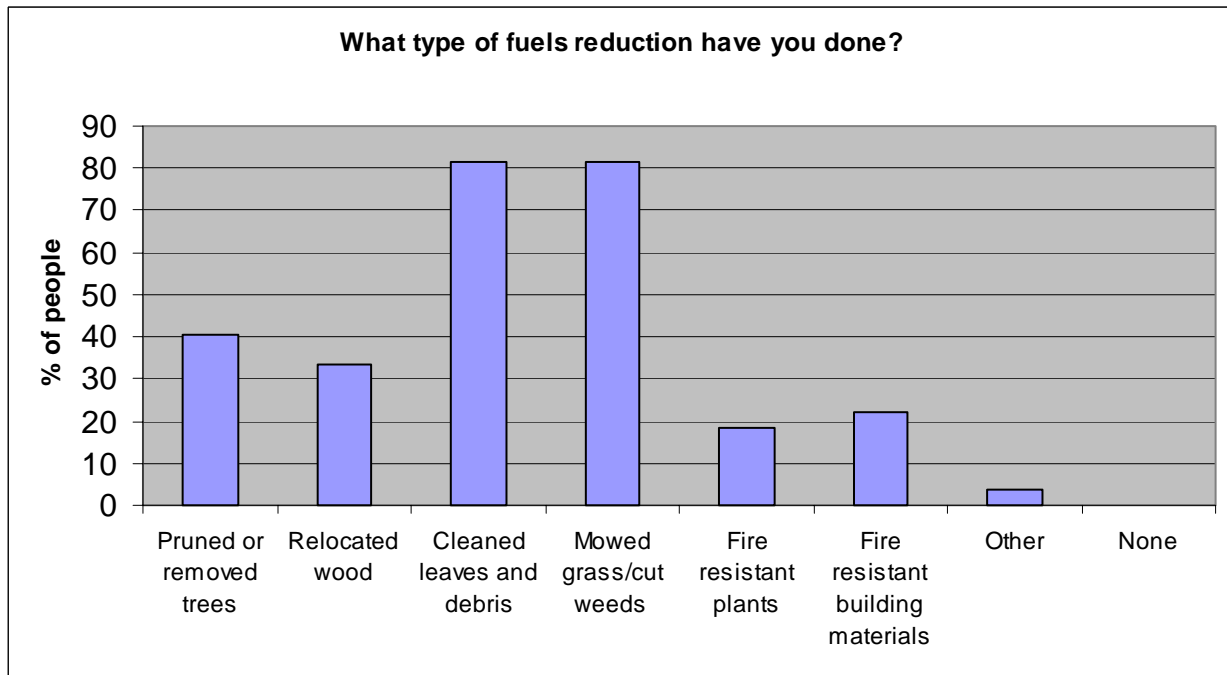
Jackson County's event was a great success with an estimated that fifty people participating and disposal of over 150 cubic yards of debris. Twenty-seven participants completed questionnaires at the Jackson County drop-off sites. Questionnaire results indicate that about approximately 89% of people traveled between 1 and 10 miles to the site. About 74% of respondents have lived in Jackson County for over 5 years. As with Josephine County, the most common way participants learned of the event was also through newspaper (about 66%). Table 5 illustrates how people heard about the event.

Table 5. Jackson County Event Marketing



Similar to Jo-Gro responses, the top three most common types of fuels reduction included mowing grass, pruning trees and cleaning leaves and debris from their home and yard. Table 6 illustrates the types of fuel reduction performed by participants.

Table 6. Fuels Reduction Efforts

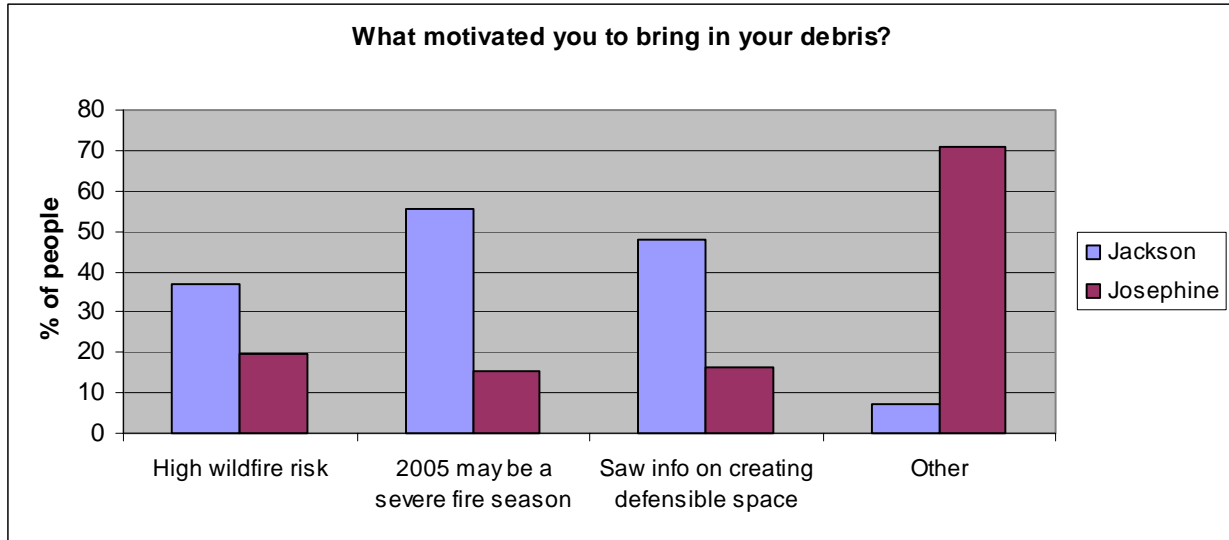


### Regional Findings

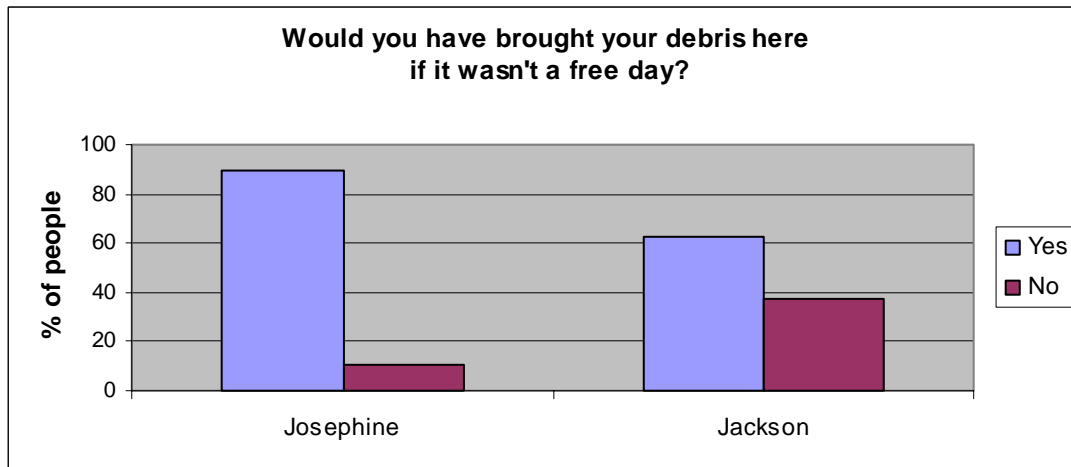
In terms of motivation for bringing in woody debris, about 37% indicated concern about high wildfire risk in the county, 55.5% felt that 2005 may be a severe fire season and 48%

who had heard about creating defensible space. Unlike the Josephine County responses, about 37% of people who were questioned would not have participated in the event if it was not free. Tables 7 and 8 provide comparisons of Jackson and Josephine County in these areas.

**Table 7. Personal Motivation**

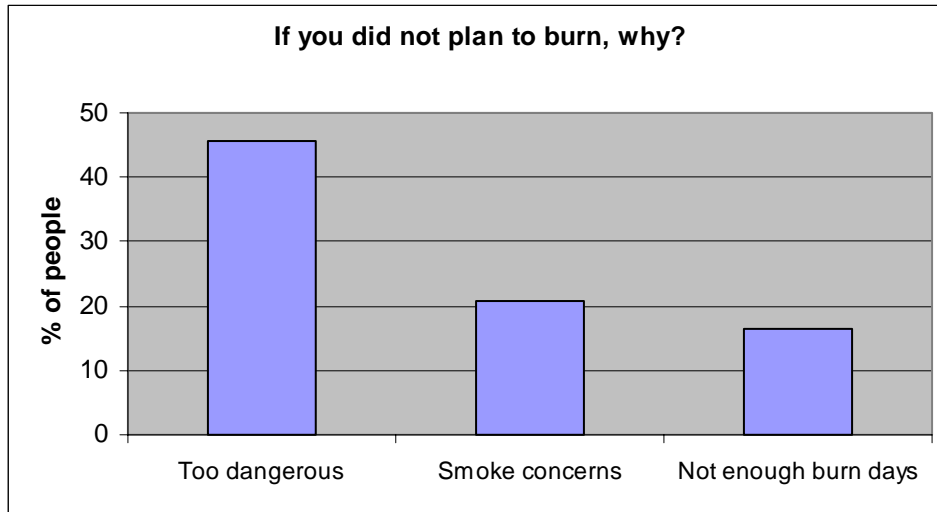


**Table 8. Willingness to Bring Debris**



A majority of respondents (88%) indicated that they did defensible space in order to protect their home and property. In addition, many were concerned with personal safety (40.7%) and/or visual appearance (48%). About a third of the respondents would have burned their debris if they didn't bring it to the disposal day. Of those who would not choose to burn, nearly half were concerned that it is too dangerous. Table 9 illustrates why respondents chose not to burn their woody debris.

Table 9. Regional Burning concerns



## Summary

The public turnout and cubic yards of debris collected illustrate the success of the first Woody Vegetation Disposal Day. The event was advertised through flyers, newspaper articles, radio and television. However, the fact that many of the questionnaire respondents in Josephine County were not aware of the event suggests a need in the future for even more media outreach. The most common way people learned of the event was by newspaper. Future outreach to more rurally based news sources (such as the Applegator, Sunny Wolf Community Response Team Newsletter, *Big News* and other newspapers) to increase awareness of the event countywide is essential.

Participants were motivated to bring their woody debris. However, a relatively small percentage of people in Josephine County listed their motivation for bringing in debris as being a direct concern with fire risk. Many indicated "other" as a choice and the variety of responses was large. Additionally, a number of people living within Grants Pass didn't think that fire was a concern for them at all. This information indicates a need for further education about fire safety and risk. Future planning efforts for disposal days may include a more assertive educational component. Additionally, a media campaign within Grants Pass that is tailored to those who live in the city may be useful in educating people about fire risk.

Participants from Josephine County overwhelmingly indicated that they would have brought their woody vegetation to JO-GRO even if it had not been a free drop-off day. However, in Jackson County, a larger percentage (about 37%) of the participants said that they would not have brought their debris if it had not been a free day. Future planning for debris days in the different communities may need to pay attention to such monetary concerns.