

Communication Audit  
Oakridge Air

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## About This Communication Audit

Oakridge Air serves the communities of Oakridge and Westfir and promotes healthy air quality through individual and community resources. Oakridge Air, which is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency, has five program areas: home heating upgrades, community firewood, school education, cleaner indoor air, and code enforcement. Oakridge Air uses several communication strategies to engage community members in these programs. This audit provides an overview of Oakridge Air's communication engagement and messaging strategy, focusing on messaging from 2021-2022, to provide strategic communication recommendations for future work. This audit focuses primarily on the Oakridge Air Communication Plan and messaging templates, community newsletters, text messaging service, Oakridge Air's Facebook page, and Oakridge Air's website. The newsletters and text messaging service have been essential and valued communication tools with substantial engagement growth spurred by major wildfire smoke events in 2022. The Facebook page and website are likely one of the first channels community members use to begin engaging with Oakridge Air. The communication plan and messaging templates provide internal guidance for message design and delivery. Given the increased engagement with Oakridge Air, there is an opportunity to leverage the positive experience and community-supported impact of these communication efforts to motivate more understanding of air quality and wildfire smoke effects along with short and long-term actions to mitigate risk and impacts.

## OVERARCHING AUDIT GOALS

- 1 Document Oakridge Air's overall engagement and messaging strategy
- 2 Provide strategic communication recommendations

### 3 Recommend next steps for assessing audience engagement and messaging effectiveness

To achieve these goals, two communication researchers assessed Oakridge Air’s communications efforts. Oakridge Air staff provided access to all communications materials, including available metrics, brand guide, print and digital materials, and text messaging archive. The audit was conducted between January and May 2023. While the nature of the available data provides a comprehensive view of Oakridge Air’s communication efforts, it does not provide insight into the effectiveness of communications. To assess the effectiveness of Oakridge Air’s communication efforts, we recommend next steps (see Recommended Next Steps for Assessing Message Effectiveness section) to better understand individual and community reception of Oakridge Air’s messages and future needs for information.

While specific recommendations are present throughout this report (in bold and underlined text), we generally found that communication materials from Oakridge Air had well-placed trust cues (e.g., logos) along with a local focus that is likely to increase the relevance and interest of community members. **Recommendations for improvement include using more concise writing, providing concrete and direct actions, integrating more strategic messaging appeals, and thinking about audience segmentation.**

## Outreach and Engagement Plan Findings

### Overview

Oakridge Air’s communication plan states its goal is to “build trust in the community and to raise awareness of the program elements that can benefit the entire community.” The current plan is well-designed to meet this goal. The communication materials examined in the audit contain a high quantity and quality of trust cues (e.g., logos, authority appeals, demonstrations of community service). The materials also frequently focused on how the program benefited the community. The communication plan includes both two-way and one-way communication tactics. Two-way communication has been shown to promote trust, one of the primary communication goals. Additionally, two-way communication provides a space for community members to seek clarifications and has a higher persuasion potential than one-way communication. One-way communication can be best utilized to build general program awareness and serve as reminders to community members that Oakridge Air is present in the community and how they can access its programs.

### Recommendations

The audit found that the communication plan is strong and well-aligned with the content in the communication materials. **The core recommendation is to introduce more planned strategic messaging appeals together with the tactics.** While the plan is rich in *tactics*, it lacks much detail on messaging *strategy*.

- *Tactics* are the specific executions for how you will accomplish the organization’s goal (e.g., newsletters, ambassador program, social media posts).

- *Strategies* reflect more on motivation through the themes, feelings, and thoughts that answer the question of how you will achieve that goal (e.g., offering incentives, encouraging problem solving, showing how popular an action is). Strategies should guide the look, feel, and content of different tactics.

We recommend considering how the following strategies could be used across the variety of tactics presented in the plan.

**Storytelling.** Narratives and testimonials from past program participants. Stories are typically more interesting and memorable than pure informational messages, which will help keep Oakridge Air's programs relevant throughout the year, not just in times of poor air quality. Through testimonials and stories, audiences can gain a new understanding and perspective on how and why to engage with Oakridge Air. Stories can be written to reinforce the key program impacts and components. Stories of experiences with Oakridge Air from "real people" tend to be rated as credible and give audiences a sense that the same thing could happen to them if they did that same behavior (response efficacy).

**Emotional appeals to hope and urgency.** Hope has been shown to be a strong motivator. Hope is an emotion that is evoked by thoughts of a future desired outcome that is possible, but not certain. This future outcome could be something good happening or the avoidance of something bad. Successful appeals to hope help people see the actions they can take to make that future desirable outcome more likely. Urgency appeals can help move people from motivation to action. Urgency appeals assign a positive quality or reason to act now rather than remaining in a consideration mode. One messaging approach that includes hope and urgency is a teleological approach. The teleological approach relies on showing what the world would look like if a problem had already been solved. The target public is shown the ideal result of implementing a desired behavior, along with a script advising how to make the ideal result become reality. In this case, the teleological appeal might include imagery of Oakridge with clean skies and references to breathing air that feels clean, along with an explicit connection to how certain recommended actions will result in that future.

**Bandwagon and categorization.** Showing momentum towards a common goal. Tactics should include opportunities for people to see how many others are involved in the program. The bandwagon strategy makes an idea seem contagious (in a good way). It builds up a social norm for what people are thinking and doing. The categorization strategy helps reframe how people think about an issue by associating it with something they like or believe in. This can work to reframe ideas and the people who support them. For example, one challenge that Oakridge Air may face is to categorize low air quality as a problem that has a solution rather than something we can't do much about. Another application of categorization in the campaign is to attribute a positive label to the people supporting the project (e.g., champions and protectors).

**Acknowledging barriers by recognizing the appeal of inaction.** It's tempting not to want to draw attention to the reasons people have for not engaging with Oakridge Air, but acknowledging these barriers can help reduce resistance and build trust. It is important to recognize that inaction has its appeal/benefits to some people. Acknowledging the appeal of inaction as a barrier and providing ways and reasons to overcome that barrier should help move some people from motivation to action. This strategy acknowledges that community members may have reasons for their inaction (e.g., feeling they don't have enough time to make changes or low response efficacy). When these barriers are acknowledged, audiences feel understood and can be more open to engaging with an organization. After acknowledging this, Oakridge Air can provide low-barrier options for involvement, counter misperceptions, and offer rewards (e.g., public recognition) to make the benefits of action outweigh the barriers.

## Messaging Templates Findings

The messaging templates for prescribed fire, wildfire and Firewise, and woodsmoke are thorough and well-designed for recurring messaging needs. Several of the message templates have been employed through Oakridge Air's Facebook page and are performing well. For example, a pile burning post on May 1, 2023, reached more than 100 people. A yellow day advisory posted on January 31, 2023, reached more than 80 people. You can try different avenues to increase the reach of these posts by using photographs on messages that are purely text-based and asking followers to share the information with others.

One strong point of the messaging templates is the use of images to show concrete examples of what might otherwise be difficult to conceptualize. For example, on the Woodsmoke Master Message document, there is a Home Heating Exemption List template (1B.ii.) that shows the difference between 80% and 20% smoke opacity from a wood stove (see Figure 1). Visuals are a useful tool for people to understand the difference between 80% and 20%, which otherwise might be too abstract to conceptualize. Another good example of providing visual cues is the Alternative Heating Options template (4D), which shows what a cadet wall heater and an electric radiator heater look like. These visuals help ease the cognitive load on individuals who might otherwise have to go look up additional information to understand the message. We recommend using visuals to easily show audiences information that may otherwise be difficult to conceptualize (80% or 20% opacity) or understand if the audience isn't familiar with the topic (such as types of heating systems).

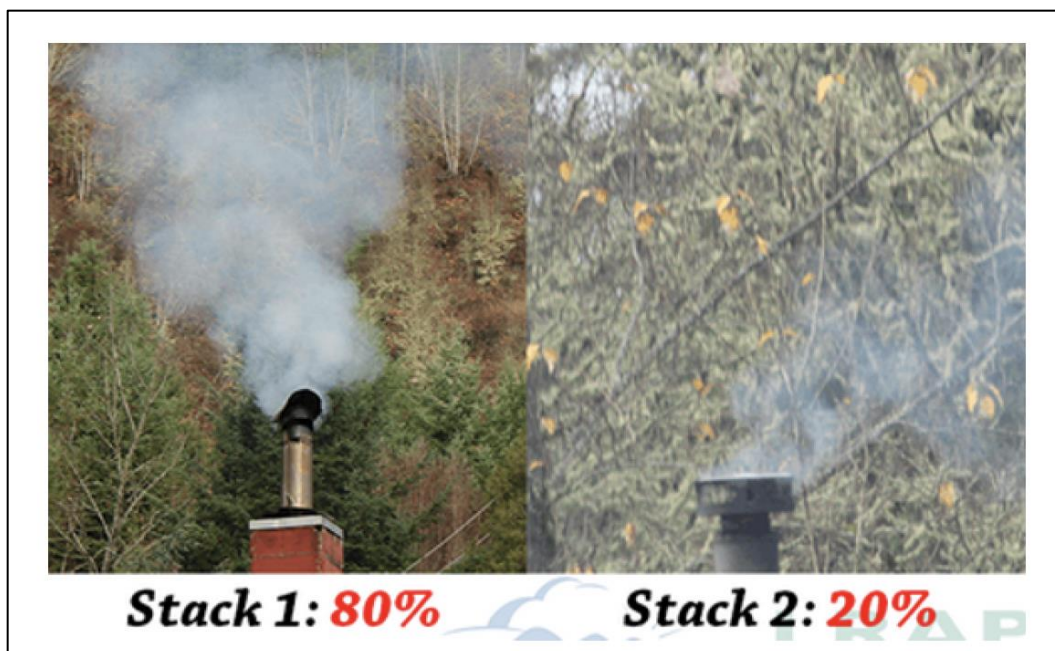


Figure 1. An excerpt from the Woodsmoke Master Message document highlights the difference between 80% and 20% smoke opacity.

A general recommendation for the messaging templates is to refine and standardize the use of different terms, such as press release and blog. For example, in the Prescribed Fire Master Message document, it seems there are both blog and press release templates mixed together. If press releases are to be used, those should be created and updated in the master messaging list or more clearly labeled so different users of the document can understand the different purposes for each. For the Woodsmoke Master Messages document, there are no templates for text alerts, but there are social media and blog templates. In the Wildfire and Firewise Master Messages document, the table of contents says there are templates for text alerts and press releases, but those are not found in the actual contents of the document. **In addition to revising these documents to be more streamlined for use, we strongly recommend clearly outlining how to determine when to use which template.**

## Newsletter Findings

### **Engagement Metrics**

Newsletter layout and copy were available for five newsletters from March 2021 to June 2022. Newsletter distribution and engagement metrics were available for two additional newsletters (September 2022 and January 2023) and absent for July 2021. Based on the materials available for analysis, we found significant growth in distribution and much greater engagement than industry averages (see Figure 2). The percentage of people who open an email newsletter is called an “open rate.” The average open rate for an email newsletter reported by MailChimp (the largest email-sending company in the U.S.) is 21%. By comparison, **Oakridge Air’s average open rate across available data was 42%** (see Figure 3). That demonstrates that people who

signed up for the newsletter are quite interested in reading it. This often indicates an audience’s good relationship and perceived value in the organization. The industry average click rate, the proportion of people who clicked on at least one link in the newsletter, is 3%, whereas **Oakridge Air’s average click rate was 11%**. Again, this indicates that people were interested in the content and wanted to learn more and engage with the newsletter content. See below for distribution and engagement trends.



Figure 2. Oakridge Air’s newsletter subscriber counts for each newsletter sent.

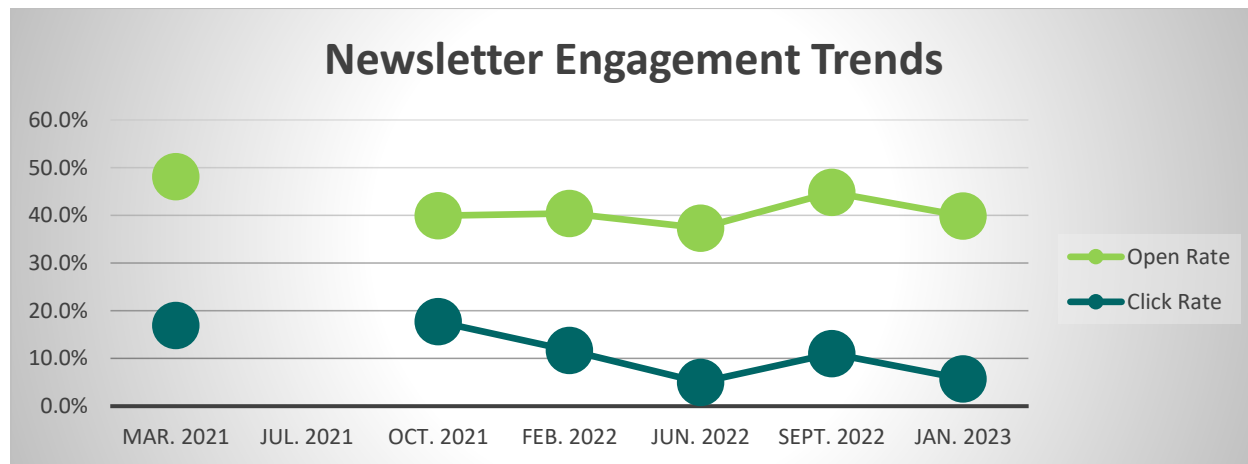


Figure 3. Oakridge Air’s newsletter open rates and click rates from March 2021 to Jan. 2023.

### Newsletter Length

From 2021 to 2022, newsletters became longer with more sections, on average. For example, the March 2021 newsletter featured four separate topical sections, with three of those sections including images/graphics. **The June 2022 newsletter contained 10 sections, with eight featuring images/graphics.** Generally, we would not recommend such long newsletters as they tend to reduce the audience’s willingness to open them over time and can result in the audience skimming content rather than deeply engaging with it. The open rate for Oakridge Air does not currently seem impacted by the longer length of their newsletters. **However, we strongly advise a maximum of six sections in future newsletters to maintain interest and the reader’s ability to engage with the content over time.**

### **Newsletter Content**

The newsletters contain a mix of recurring and new content each month, along with announcements. **Content topics that most frequently reoccurred were information about the home audit and upgrades program, the portable air filters program, and Firewise.** Multiple newsletters also included an introduction to local Oakridge Air staff. See Table 1 for a list of content topics and their frequency across newsletters.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Newsletter Frequency</b>
Home audit and upgrades	5
Portable air purifiers	5
Firewise	4
Staff feature	3
High School woodshed program	2
Oakridge Air coloring contest	2
Oakridge Air overview/services summary	2
Pile burning info/announcements	2
Wood stove info/replacement/maintenance	2
Ductless heat pumps	1
Firewood best practices	1
Fuels mitigation work	1
Grant award announcement	1
Home heating best practices	1
Oakridge air job opening	1
Partner acknowledgement	1
Wildfire safety night event announcement	1
Wildfire smoke updates	1
Yard waste disposal program	1

*Table 1. Frequency of topics contained in Oakridge Air newsletters.*

**We recommend the following layout for content sections to sustain reader interest** and continue educating readers about programs and best practices:

- Section 1: New topic perceived to be most relevant/interesting to readers
- Section 2: New topic or event announcement
- Section 3: Important recurring topic/update
- Section 4: Staff feature
- Section 5: New special interest community project (e.g., high school woodsheds, coloring contest)
- Section 6: Important recurring topic/update

### ***Newsletter Communication Strategies***

The most common communication and persuasion strategy that appeared in the newsletters was a **focus on the benefits and incentives of Oakridge Air programs**. Examples of the benefits and incentive strategy are “Would you like a FREE new certified wood stove...” and “This means cost savings on your water bill and potentially saving your home from wildfire!” A benefits and incentive strategy can effectively bring people into initial action, especially if they have little knowledge or involvement in the issue. They work best when people are assured or certain that if they take the action, then they will get the specific benefit. This type of strategy is quite effective. However, there are types of people on whom it is less effective on, and thus it should not be used exclusively. **Future newsletters might consider including additional strategies that may work on people for whom the benefits strategy is less effective.** These strategies emphasize the scarcity of the available benefit or limited time to access the benefit, along with describing the loss or consequences of not taking action (e.g., health consequences). We still recommend primarily focusing on the benefits, incentives, or gains as Oakridge Air has done. However, we recommend occasionally speaking in the alternative by highlighting the scarcity or consequences too.

The next most common communication and persuasion strategy in the newsletters was an **implied problem-solver appeal**. An explicit problem-solver appeal shows a problem and demonstrates the favored way to solve the problem. This strategy assumes the target public will care enough about the problem to respond. However, if an audience does care and sees the problem as relevant to their lives, this strategy is quite effective. The Oakridge Air newsletters use an “implied” problem-solver strategy rather than a straightforward problem-solver approach. In this case, the problem is not explained but implied, and there’s an assumption that the audience and Oakridge have a shared understanding of the problem. For example, the newsletter might state, “Visit (website) for real-time air quality measurements.” This is a solution to an implied need/problem. **We recommend that the newsletter content be more explicit about the problem when presenting solutions.** For example, “There is smoke in the air. Do you know if it’s safe to breathe? Visit our (website) for real-time air quality measurements and recommendations.”

### ***Newsletter Communication Cues***

Our analysis also examined the presence or absence of important communication cues that have been shown to improve organizational credibility and audience understanding and action.

First, we looked at what **cues were present that would build trust in Oakridge Air**. We found that three types of content that frequently occurred were likely to engender trust: (1) logo presence – build authority and credibility; (2) staff features – builds trust through a human connection that demonstrates similarity and identification with the community; and (3) examples and images of Oakridge Air working in the community – the friendly pictures and descriptions of how neighbors were helped are likely to build trust and liking towards Oakridge Air. **In regard to building trust through the newsletter, we have no further recommendations, as Oakridge Air is likely succeeding mightily in this category.**



Second, we examined what cues to action (CTA) were present. CTA are important communication steps that lead to greater compliance with organizational goals and program uptake. All newsletters had CTA, and most were direct and well-placed (e.g., “Log your Firewise Hours”). However, some were passive or focused on informational uptake only (e.g., “Learn more on our website (linked)”). **When writing the newsletter, consider the CTA for each section and attempt to make it concrete and direct.**

Next, we noted that most newsletters contained at least some jargon or missing context. This was not present in most of the content sections but was typically present at least once per newsletter. An example of missing context is in the March 2021 newsletter, which begins with “The first six homes have begun their upgrades as part of the program pilot.” There is no context for anyone who doesn't know what the program pilot is and no explanation of the upgrades. This section writing style would be a valuable internal update for staff, but may be confusing to the average community reader. The pilot program is referenced in other newsletters with little context as well. Examples of jargon include words and phrases like “mitigation” and “weatherization.” **We recommend writing the newsletter as if the readers don't remember or aren't familiar with all of the programs and daily happenings associated with Oakridge Air and its mission.**

Lastly, we searched for sharing cues encouraging readers to pass on the information to their friends, family, or neighbors. There were no sharing cues present in any newsletter that we examined. These sharing cues are an easy way to increase subscribership and encourage community conversations and learning. **We recommend explicitly asking readers to share the newsletter or tell someone about specific content, as appropriate.**

## Text Messaging Findings

### ***Content, Frequency, and Engagement***

Oakridge Air text alerts, which have been employed since 2020, notify subscribers of possible smoke impacts in Oakridge and Westfir communities. The Lane Regional Protection Agency (LRAPA) is responsible for sending alerts and crafting messages. As of January 17, 2023, **LRAPA had sent 60 messages using the system.** Most messages are smoke advisories sent between August and October each year (see Figure 4). The text alerts currently reach more than 800 subscribers, and many subscribers signed up during the smoke event in the fall of 2022. There is a **92% delivery rate** as of January 2023. Beyond the delivery rate, very few metrics were available due to EZ Text limitations. **We recommend capturing metrics (subscribe/unsubscribe/click rates, etc.) for messages at regular intervals to better understand engagement and reach.** As learned through this audit, EZ Text metrics are only saved for one year and can be viewed based on the current date (e.g., today, yesterday, last seven days, last 30 days, etc.).

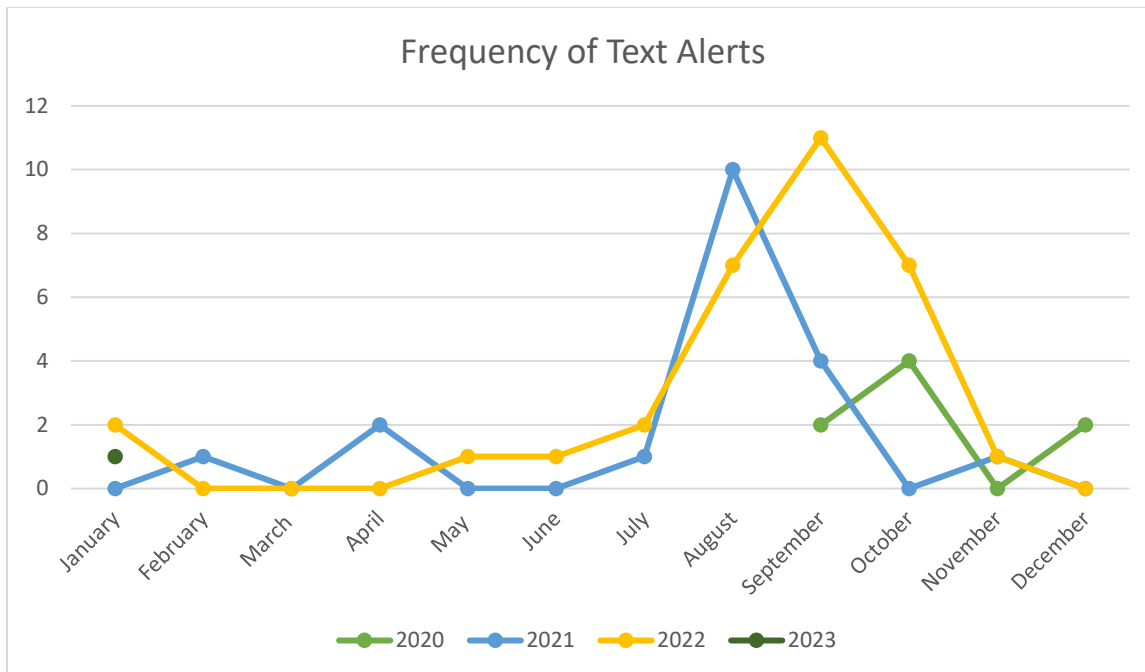


Figure 4. Frequency of text messages sent from September 2020 through January 17, 2023. The majority of messages are smoke advisories sent between August and October.

Primary Topic	Message Frequency
Smoke Advisory (home heating, wildfire, prescribed burning)	43
Air purifier distribution	6
Cleaner Air Space Notification	5
Community Events (e.g., wildfire safety night)	4
Evacuation	2

Table 2. Primary contents of text messages sent from September 2020 through January 17, 2023.

### Message Length

Messages varied in length, from 29 to 253 words, with an **average of 120 words**. The longest messages dealt with evacuation during the 2022 wildfires or were messages that covered multiple topics. **While longer text messages may be necessary for evacuation notices and other critical information, we recommend shortening other messages when possible.** Short Message Service (SMS) formats are limited to 160 characters, and we recommend shortening messages to this length whenever possible. Be clear and concise. Most messages also included an image, meaning they were sent in Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) format. While images can be useful for creative and promotional campaigns, they may not be necessary for every message. If MMS formats are used, images should be simple and highlight the most important information from the text. Many of the messages sent for home heating air quality days had important trust cues (logos for Oregon Health Authority and Oakridge Air) and relayed the essential information. Other messages, such as those for prescribed burning or wildfire

smoke impacts, had more technical graphics, such as maps and air quality graphs. **We recommend considering when an image is truly necessary and encourage the use of simple images that reinforce the message text.**

### ***Communication Cues***

Thirty-eight messages included a link, and the most frequently provided links were for [airnow.gov](http://airnow.gov) or to air purifier applications and instructions. Less common links included links to the Oakridge Air Facebook page, videos on DIY filters, and videos for making a clean fire. Links are a way to build engagement, signal trust by connecting to reputable websites, and direct audiences to other content. **We recommend the majority of messages should continue to provide links to air quality guides, including [airnow.gov](http://airnow.gov), and encourage preparation for the smoke season through occasional pre-season alerts.** Continue to direct subscribers to Oakridge Air’s website for tips on preparing for an upcoming smoke season or other program efforts.

Most messages had some cue to action that told recipients how to take protective action or where to get more information. For smoke advisories, these included spending minimal time outdoors, taking breaks, and making a DIY filter. Many were less specific or vague (e.g., when air quality improves, open doors and windows; look for opportunities of better air quality to open doors), and assume the recipient knows when air quality has improved enough to take action. In addition, many messages were passive and didn’t address recipients directly (e.g., it is recommended everyone limit their time outside) or didn’t provide exact guidance on action (e.g., keep tabs on air quality and take actions to improve your health). **We strongly recommend providing more specific cues to action when possible.** For example, the message “open windows when AQI is under 100” is more specific than “look for opportunities to open windows.” We recommend being more specific about what action to take (i.e., go inside, turn on your air purifier) and when (i.e., when AQI is under 100) and for who the action is necessary (i.e., sensitive groups such as children, those with diabetes, heart disease, or lung disease etc.). Reduce jargon and simplify messages to alert recipients and promote the recommended protective action.

## **Facebook Findings**

### ***Audience, Reach, and Engagement<sup>1</sup>***

The Oakridge Air Facebook page has 721 followers as of May 4, 2023. This follower count is similar to other organizations of the same size and type. For comparison with other local organizations, the City of Oakridge Facebook page has 2.2K followers, Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative has 610 followers, and the U.S. Forest Service Willamette National Forest had 31K followers.

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<sup>1</sup> Engagement is measured through reactions, comments, shares, and clicks. Reach is the estimated number of people who saw your post at least one time. Impressions are the number of times your post is on screen, and the number includes when the same person views a post multiple times.

The audience is primarily female, with the majority of followers being over the age of 35 (see Figure 5) and located in Oakridge, Westfir, Eugene, and Springfield.

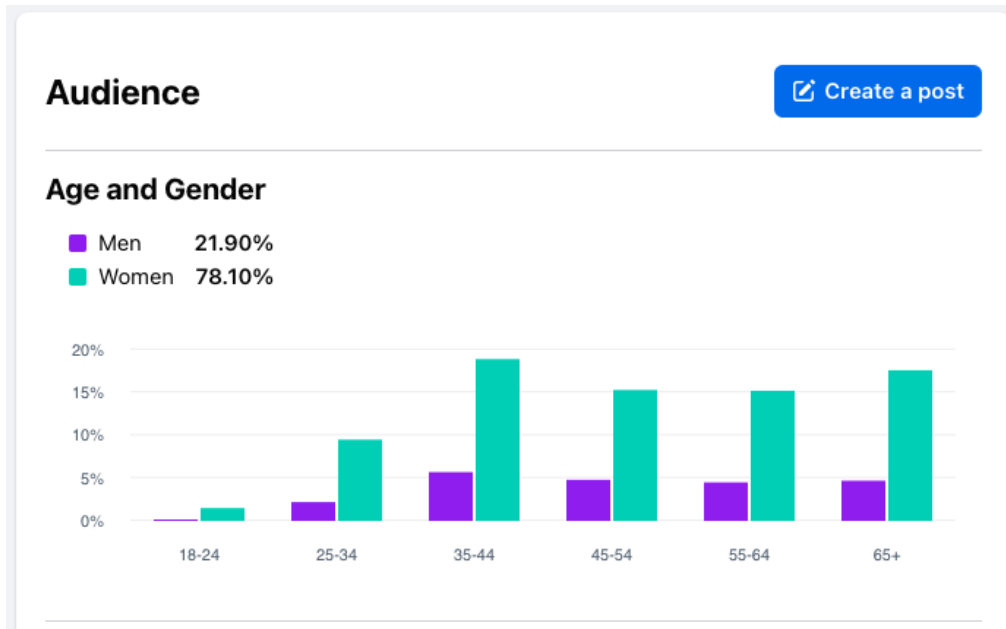


Figure 5. Audience demographics, as estimated by Facebook Insights.

**Page reach and engagement peaked in the fall of 2022 during the Cedar Creek Fire.** During that time, posts were regularly reaching more than 600 people, with five posts reaching more than 4,000 unique profiles. The post with the largest reach, 16,827, was published on September 9, 2022, and was detailing evacuation pick-up locations (see Table 3).

Date & Post	Reach	Likes & Reactions	Comments	Shares
9/9/2022 – Evacuation pick-up details	16,827	442	79	273
9/18/2022 – Cleaner air space at public library	5,982	60	0	7
9/13/2022 – Food for Lane County Mobile Pantry	5,375	64	4	28
10/14/2022 – Free Willamalane and YMCA passes	4,827	313	77	66
10/14/2022 – Behind the scenes of air purifiers distribution (photos & tags of partner orgs) and celebrated 600+ being distributed	4,275	272	98	22

Table 3. Top Facebook posts by reach 2022-2023, as estimated by Facebook Insights.

While posts and the Oakridge Air page had high engagement and reach during the fall 2022 fire season, traffic slows significantly during other parts of the year. For example, **in 2023 thus far (January 1, 2023- May 5, 2023), eight posts had a reach of more than 100** (see Figure 6). The rest had an average reach of 51. While a reach of only 51 may sound small, it represents reaching approximately 7% of followers, which is higher than the non-profit industry standard. The page’s reach was better overall in 2022 than it was in 2021 (see Figure 7).

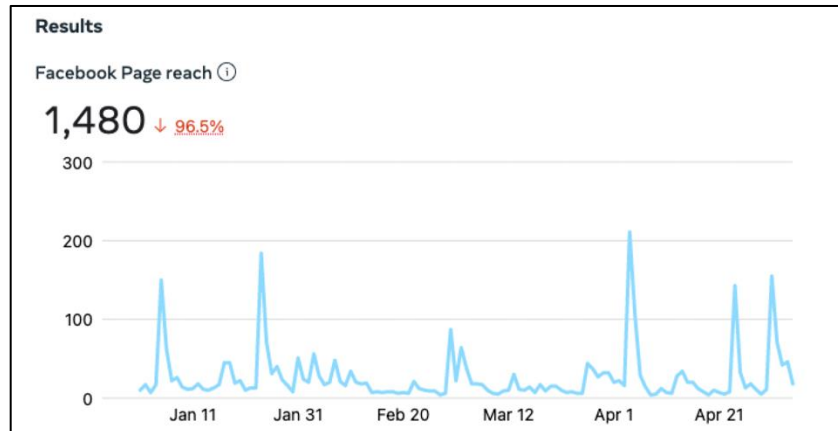


Figure 6. Facebook reach for 2023, as estimated by Facebook Insights.

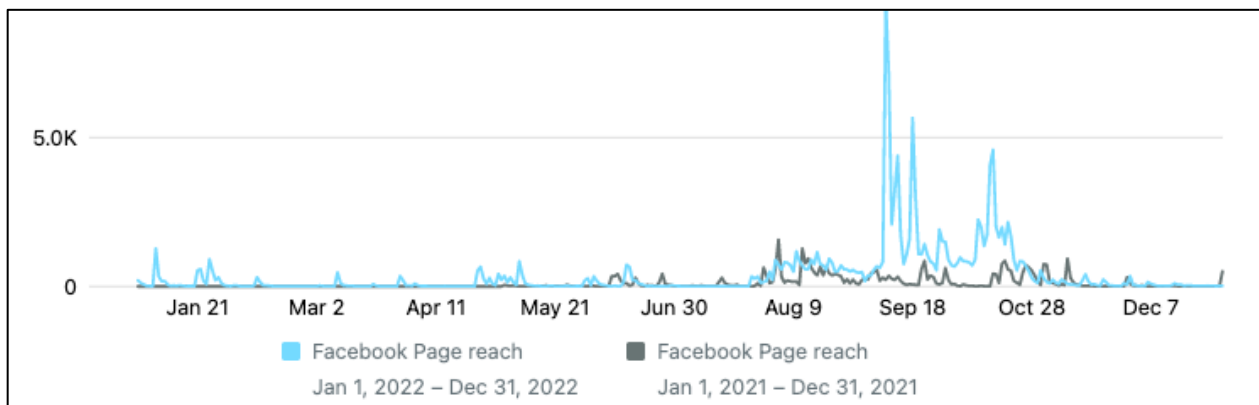


Figure 7. Facebook reach for 2021 (gray line) compared to 2022 (blue line), as estimated by Facebook Insights.

Some of the most wide-reaching posts that were not smoke outlooks or evacuation notices were those that celebrated milestones of Oakridge Air and showed a behind-the-scenes look at how air purifier distribution was happening. For example, the October 14, 2022 post that celebrated the distribution of 600+ air purifiers to the community had several photos of volunteers and staff unloading 300 purifiers. The post tagged the Cedar Creek Fire, Oregon Health Authority, Lane County Emergency Management, and Oregon Department of Human Services, thus expanding its reach. **We recommend creating more content that highlights the process behind the work happening at Oakridge Air, especially when it is in service of the community. We also recommend tagging other community organizations and partners when**

**it is appropriate.** You can also consider creating various types of content to include more short videos that highlight how home heating upgrades work or other elements of the OA program, including staff or volunteer highlights. This is an opportunity to further elaborate on the strategy for engaging audiences (such as the use of strategic messaging appeals outlined on page 2 of this report).

Content posting was not consistent and seemed to appear responsive to external circumstances that called for information sharing (e.g., smoke outlooks or community notifications). Some months had very few posts (e.g., April 2023 had four posts), while others had more (e.g., March 2023 had seven posts). **We recommend coming up with a proactive social media plan for creating and sharing information that can engage followers.** While consistent posts are not required, they can be helpful if well designed. We encourage content that is shareable or invites engagement from the audience while maintaining a local and community focus.

## Website Findings

### *Layout Overview*

The website includes six main tabs (Home, About, Smoke, Home Heating Upgrades, Firewood, and Fire Safety) with 13 dropdown options within the tabs. The homepage includes Oakridge's Air's logo, a scenic picture of Oakridge, an "About the Program" two paragraph section, a cue to "Follow Us on Facebook" along with a link, a cue to "Smoke Information" along with how to sign up for text messages, a section that highlights recent "Oakridge Air Blog Updates," a menu of "Click Here for More Information" that includes shortcuts to the about three Oakridge Air programs/advisories, another menu of "Oakridge Air Program Areas" for five separate topics, a call-out box to "Subscribe to our newsletter," a "Contact Us" link, and a search box.

The layout of the homepage presents quite differently on mobile versus desktop (see Figures 8 & 9). The layout is responsive, so it will present differently depending on available screen size. On a standard size desktop monitor only the log, menu, picture, and headings of "Follow Us on Facebook" and "About the Program" are visible. The image takes up the vast majority of the screen.



### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

#### Follow Us on Facebook

Oakridge Air

#### Smoke Information

Sign up for text alerts by texting "Oakridge Air" to 541-543-2019 or [click here!](#)

#### + HOME HEATING ADVISORY

[Click Here for More Information](#)

#### + WOOD HOME HEAT EXEMPTION

[Click Here for More Information](#)

#### + YARD WASTE DISPOSAL PROGRAM

[Click Here for More Information](#)

Subscribe to our

The communities of Oakridge and Westfir sit at the valley bottom of the western slope of the Cascades, where bad air doesn't move out. This makes our area especially vulnerable to smoke pollution from old woodstoves, burning unseasoned wood and debris, and wildfires.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) granted the Oakridge and Westfir communities \$4.9 million for projects to improve our air quality in 2019 and awarded an additional \$2.7 million in 2022. Through this project, Oakridge Air helps to lessen health impacts from wood smoke.

#### Oakridge Air Blog Updates



The Impact of South Willamette Solutions During the Cedar Creek Fire East Wind Event

Sep 16, 2022

#### Oakridge Air Program Areas



#### HOME HEATING UPGRADES

Project funding will provide at least 145 homes with home heating upgrades such as: weatherization and home repairs, ductless heat pumps, and certified wood stoves.



#### COMMUNITY FIREWOOD PROGRAM

The firewood program provides dry firewood to the community, while offering affordable firewood to low-income, senior, and disabled residents.



#### SCHOOL EDUCATION

The [Middle Fork Willamette Watershed Council](#) works with the local schools to share lessons and class

**newsletter!**

Sign up with your email address to receive news and updates.

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

We respect your privacy.



### CLEANER INDOOR AIR

Public buildings including the schools, library, city hall and police department have received air filtration to improve indoor air quality and offer cleaner air spaces when needed. In coordination with local health clinics and the schools, 500 air purifiers were be distributed to vulnerable patients and families with children.

activities about clean air.



### CODE ENFORCEMENT

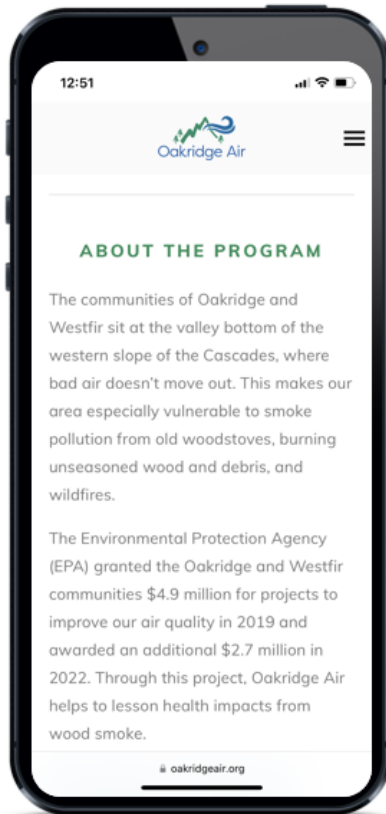
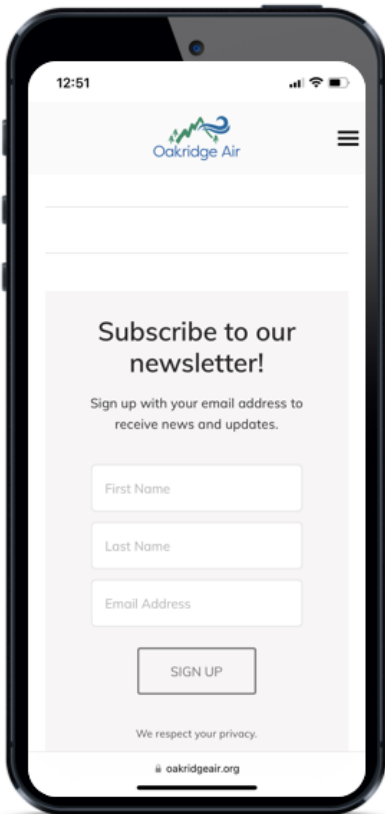
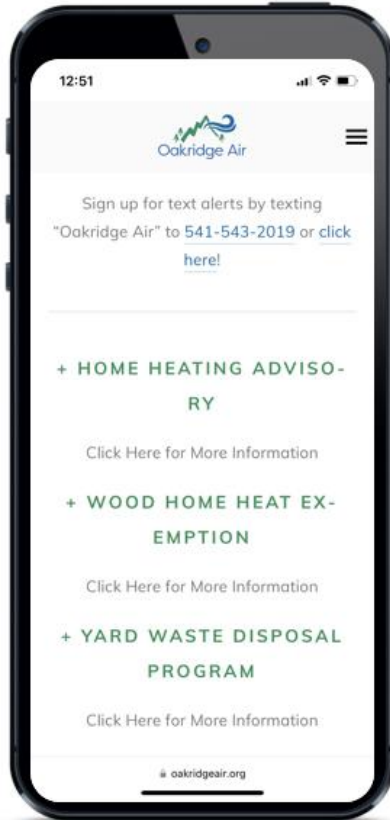
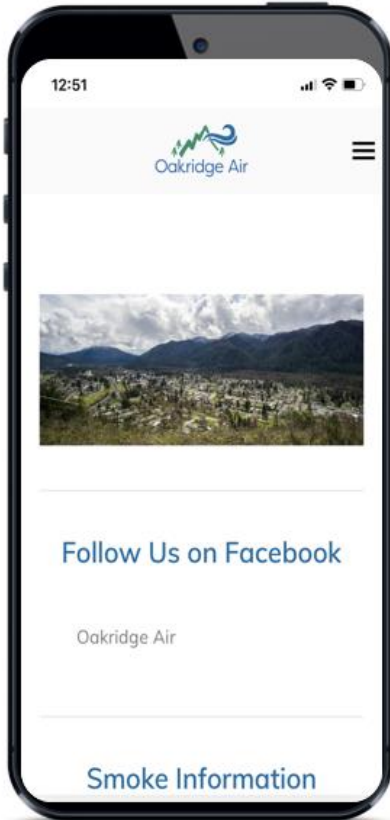
The [Oakridge Police Department](#) employs a designated code enforcement officer and has developed an education-focused diversion program for smoke code violations. All officers are trained to identify when wood stoves are not burning clean.

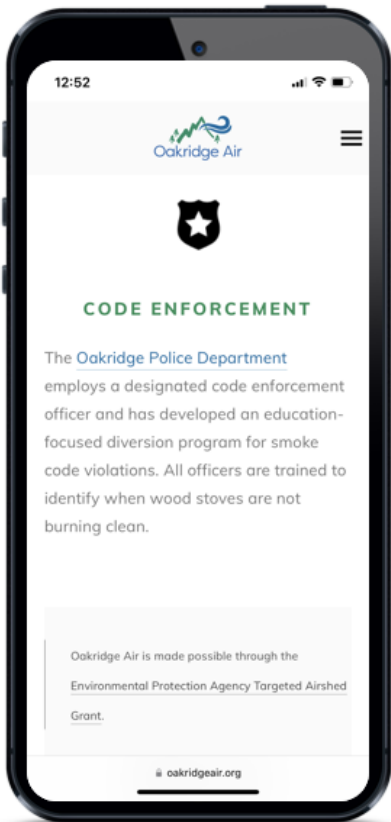
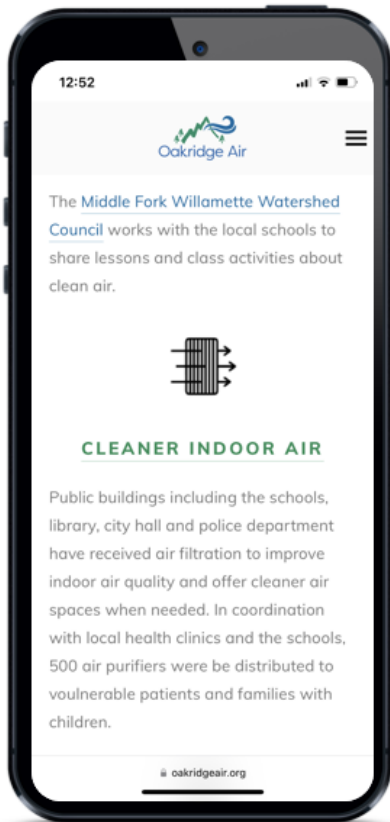
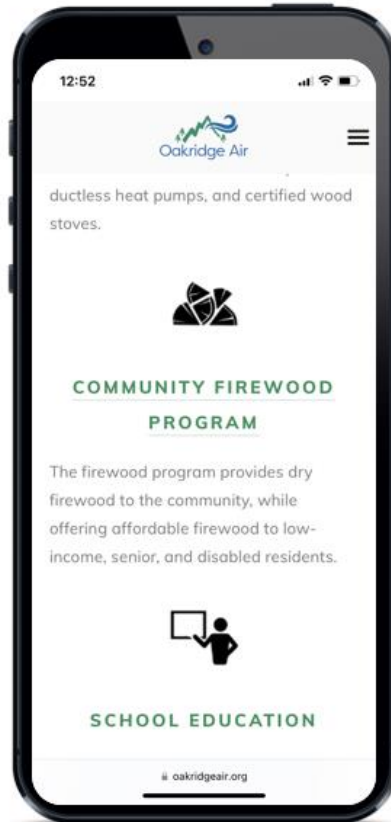
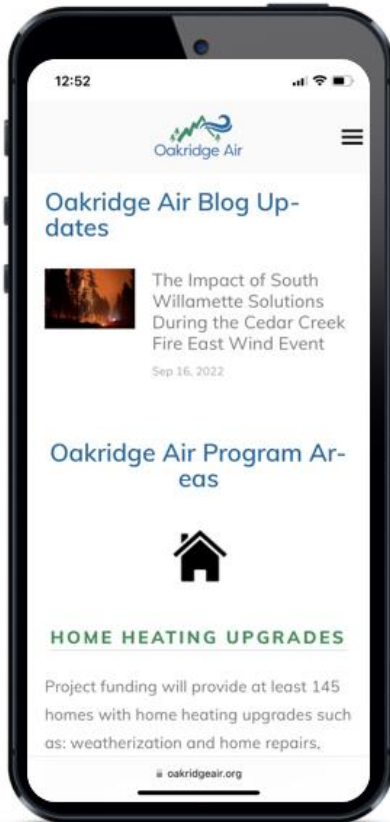
Oakridge Air is made possible through the [Environmental Protection Agency Targeted Airshed Grant](#).

**CONTACT US**

Figure 8. Homepage Desktop layout of OakridgeAir.org.







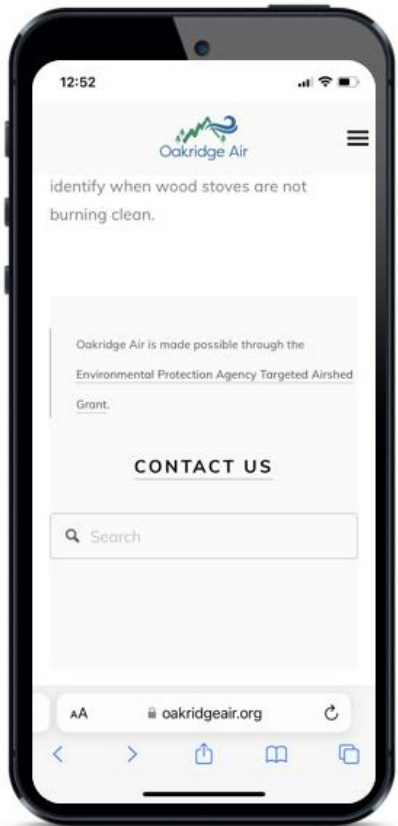


Figure 9. Homepage iPhone mobile layout of OakridgeAir.org.

The layout of the website is critical to help users have a good experience with the organization, find the information they are looking for, and engage with the organization. Multiple aspects of the OakridgeAir.org website are likely performing well:

- **Clear navigation menu:** On both desktop and mobile devices, the website’s menu is easy to find and move through. One exception is the “Home Heating Upgrades” menu has a dropdown link, which is the only option and therefore it seems unnecessary to require an extra click on that dropdown menu to access that page. The “Firewood” menu option, for example, does not have a dropdown menu because it is also a single page.
- **Responsive design:** The website is responsive and adjusts to the screen size of the user.
- **Fast loading time:** We accessed the website dozens of times over different days and on various devices and found the loading time to be consistently fast.
- **Consistent:** The font colors and sizing along with spacing are consistent, which likely increases the professional appearance of the website and contributes to organizational credibility.

Some aspects of the OakridgeAir.org website layout could likely be improved:

- **Visual hierarchy:** Typically, users are going to assume that information at the top is more important than information at the bottom. That is not necessarily true with the current website layout, and especially not with the mobile presentation. For instance, the Oakridge image takes up most of the top space on both mobile and desktop with little critical information appearing on either type of layout. The desktop website also employs both a horizontal and a vertical hierarchy with information appearing on multiple levels. This is likely a bit confusing and possibly frustrating to users as they have to scan and sort through where to look to find information. Overall recommendations would be to shrink the main image and align it with only a vertical hierarchy based on what is most important to Oakridge Air to share with their publics.
- **Headline:** The website includes clear sub-headings on the homepage, but is missing a clear headline and short introduction above the image. This is especially critical for the mobile layout as the first screen of the homepage has very little information or guidance for the user.

### ***Content Overview***

The website content is similar to the newsletter and Facebook content that has been discussed earlier in this report. The website content is well-written and concise with well-labeled sub-sections. Some specific recommendations include:

- **Staff features:** Incorporating some of the staff features that are present in the newsletters into the “About Us” section of the website. These will add personalization to the website and help the public feel more connected to the organization.
- **Blog:** The website includes a link to a blog. The blog includes infrequent posts sometimes occur more than a year apart. Oakridge Air might consider retiring the blog as blogs are declining in popularity and not as relevant when they are infrequent. Instead, this content could be repurposed for the newsletter (which happens already) and social media posts. The website contains a large number of pages and sub-pages and eliminating unnecessary pages will help people navigate towards more critical information.
- **Incorporate more strategic messaging:** We encourage Oakridge Air to review the earlier section on Outreach and Engagement Plan findings which details several strategies that could be incorporated in the writing and content to move more people towards engagement. Three messaging strategies in particular seem appropriate for the website: messages that engender hope, urgency, and demonstrate the popularity of the programs (bandwagon).

## Overall Communication Recommendations

We generally found that communication materials from Oakridge Air had well-placed trust cues (e.g., logos) along with a local focus that is likely to increase the relevance and interest of community members. In an effort to continually refine Oakridge Air's communication strategy, we recommend that Oakridge Air consider taking the following actions:

- 1 Shorten newsletters and text messages. While we found that newsletters and text messages had good delivery and open rates, the content was often lengthy. Consider tightening messages to maintain audience interest.
- 2 Provide more concrete and direct cues to action. For both text messages and newsletters, consider providing concrete action steps. Be specific about recommended protective actions and when they apply to certain groups. Also, consider asking newsletter readers to share information and/or content.
- 3 Incorporate more strategic messaging appeals. While Oakridge Air is doing a great job at embedding trust cues, there is an opportunity to try different messaging appeals, including storytelling, bandwagon, and emotional appeals. These can be incorporated into internal communication documents, including the communication and engagement plan and the messaging templates.
- 4 Consider how to personalize content in the future. Oakridge Air currently uses one version of content for all audiences. There may be opportunities in the future to create more personalized content based on audience segmentation. For example, some community members might be more interested in the health impacts for sensitive groups, while others might be more interested in how to prepare their home for the upcoming wildfire season. Consider asking subscribers what content they would like to see and offer more personalized content, within reason, at different points in time.

## Recommended Next Steps for Assessing Message Effectiveness

As mentioned previously, although the current data provides a comprehensive view of Oakridge Air's communication efforts, it does not provide insight into the effectiveness of communications. To better understand the information needs of Oakridge and Westfir community members, we recommend including several the following questions in a survey sent through the Oakridge Air newsletter list. Supplementary data should also be gathered in the community for those who are not subscribed to the newsletter.

Potential survey questions have been adapted from recent studies of information-seeking behavior around smoke in the Western United States (Hoshiko et al., 2023).

Please circle the number that shows how much you agree or disagree with each statement. (1-5 scale, 1=disagree, 5=agree).

- I am satisfied with the information I receive about smoke and its air quality impacts in my area.
- I am satisfied with the information I receive about the mental health impacts from smoke.
- I am satisfied with the information I receive about the physical health impacts from smoke.
- I know where to turn for information about smoke and its impact on my community.
- I am satisfied with the information I receive from Oakridge Air.
- I am satisfied with the information I receive from the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency.
- I trust the information I receive from Oakridge Air.
- I trust the information I receive from the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency.

Please indicate how you have been notified of air quality impacts in your community (check all that apply; I have received information in the past, I would like to receive information from here in the future, I am not familiar with this source.)

- Local news (television)
- Local news (online, such as Highway 58)
- Local news (radio)
- Local news (print newspaper)
- Local government
- Oakridge Air newsletters
- Oakridge Air text message service
- Oakridge Air social media
- US Forest Service
- Oregon Department of Forestry
- Lane Regional Air Protection Agency
- AirNow.gov
- Flyers in the community
- Roadway sign
- Friends and family
- Other

Please tell us what types of information you would like to receive from Oakridge Air

- Home heating program updates (eligibility, applications, etc.)
- Community firewood program updates
- How to prepare your home for wildfire season

- Physical health information related to smoke events, such as health risks and recommended protective measures for populations with various medical conditions
- Mental health information for coping with smoke events
- How to set up a clean air room inside my home
- How to access a clean air shelter in my community
- Information about temporary relocation from smoky areas during fire events
- Other protective actions, such as how to improve air filtration (HVAC) in my home
- How to find air quality information and forecast on my smartphone
- Information about upcoming prescribed fires
- Staff features
- Community event information
- Other

## References & Resources

[https://www.airnow.gov/sites/default/files/2021-09/wildfire-smoke-guide\\_0.pdf](https://www.airnow.gov/sites/default/files/2021-09/wildfire-smoke-guide_0.pdf)

<https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/textmessages.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/index.html>

<https://mailchimp.com/resources/email-marketing-benchmarks/#:~:text=The%20average%20email%20open%20rate,the%20emails%20you%20send%20them.>

Hoshiko, S., Buckman, J. R., Jones, C. G., Yeomans, K. R., Mellow, A., Thilakaratne, R., Sergienko, E., Allen, K., Bello, L., & Rappold, A. G. (2023). Responses to wildfire and prescribed fire smoke: A survey of medically vulnerable adult population in the wildland-urban interface, Mariposa County, California. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20, 1210.