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Workshop on

**Defense of Villages, Farms and Other Rural Assets against Wildfires:**

**Guidelines for Rural Populations, Local Community and Municipality Leaders in the Balkan Region**

National Technical University of Athens 13 May 2012, Athens, Greece

**Agenda**

**Background and Rationale**

In some regions of Europe rural settlements (villages, towns, scattered farmsteads) and other rural assets (agricultural fields / crops, infrastructures and other values at risk) are increasingly endangered by wildfires. This trend is driven by the consequences of land‐use change, regional climate change and particularly by the rural exodus, which has resulted in the weakening of rural work force and self‐protection ability, and increasing wildfire hazard on abandoned lands.

Vice‐versa, increasing industrialization and concentration of populations in some areas exert a high pressure on natural resources for land use change, which is reflected by the high frequency of arson and ‘unknown’‐cause fires in the wildlands. The intermix of human settlements with natural ecosystems and the fires burning at the interface between wildlands and rural settlements in many places create severe problems, which have become a major issue of political debate and confrontation.

Recent major wildfire disasters in Europe reveal that government authorities and civil society, notably rural communities, are not sufficiently prepared to prevent and reduce the risk of wildfires, to defend rural communities and rural assets at risk, and to protect human health

and altogether human security against the adverse direct and indirect impacts and consequences of wildfires.

Guidelines are needed that will provide information to local inhabitants (farmers, community leaders, local fire service units, volunteer firefighters and village defense committees) with state‐of‐the‐art information on wildfire damage prevention measures, and pragmatic measures for the defense of settlements and rural assets threatened by wildfires. With such guidelines local communities will be capacitated to apply all fire safety regulations for protecting the structures of the community (clearing vegetation, provide extra sources of water, application of appropriate building codes and use of appropriate materials, etc.) and for the protection of rural populations against the adverse effects of vegetation fire smoke pollution on human health and security. Also, the problem of fires burning on terrain altered by human activities, such as fires affecting dispersed, sometimes abandoned structures, waste deposits / garbage dumps and otherwise contaminated lands, needs to be addressed due to the highly toxic emissions generated by co‐burning of natural vegetation and technical / chemical produce.

In addition, the threats arising from fires burning on territories contaminated by unexploded ordnance (UXO) need to be addressed since some forest and non‐forest lands in Balkan region are contaminated by land mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) stemming from recent conflicts.

In order to enhance the capabilities of local rural communities to defend themselves against wildfires a set of guidelines are currently developed in order to:

• Provide a practical technical document designed as a support tool for the protection of people and communities in Balkan region from wildfires;

• Serve as a starting point and basis for the exchange of expertise and concepts within the Council of Europe / UNECE member states to continuously expand capacities in rural fire management.

The guidelines are prepared with the support from the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR‐OPA) set up by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The collaborating centers are the European Forest Fire Center (Athens), the Global Fire Monitoring Center (Germany), the Regional Southeast Europe / Caucasus Fire Monitoring Center (Skopje) and the Eastern European Fire Monitoring Center (Kiev). Members of the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire and the UNISDR Regional Eurasian and SE Europe / Caucasus Wildland Fire Networks will contribute to the development of the guidelines.

**Workshop objective**

The Athens workshop participants will review the draft Guidelines for the Defense of Rural Populations, Settlements and Other Assets against Wildfires and Smoke Pollution. This first set of guidelines will be tailored to address the conditions in Southeast Europe.

**Main topics**

1**.** Review of Part 1: Guidelines for Municipality Leaders

2. Review of Part 2: Guidelines for Local Community and Population

3. Review of Part 3: Fire training for Local Community and Population

Note: The draft materials will be transmitted to invitees briefly before the workshop, or prints

handed out at the workshop.

**Workshop Participants**

Attendance is by invitation only. Each invitee agrees to serve as resource person.

**Venue**

National Technical University of Athens

9 Iroon Polytechniou Street, 15780, Zografou campus, Athens, Greece

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**Organizing Committee**

European Center of Forest Fires (ECFF)

Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC)

Regional Southeast Europe / Caucasus Fire Monitoring Center (RFMC)

Regional Eastern European Fire Monitoring Center (REEFMC)

**Sponsors and Supporting Groups**

Council of Europe, European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR‐OPA)

Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC)

Global Wildland Fire Network / UNISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group

UNECE / FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire

**Agenda**

Monday 13 May 2013

09:00 Participants arrive at the venue

09:15 – 09:30 Welcome and introduction

09.30 – 11:00 Part 1 Review

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 – 13.00 Part 2 Review

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch break

14:00 – 15:30 Part 3 Review

15:30 – 16:00 Coffee break

16.00 – 17.00: Final discussion