

Rim Country Gazette

Official blog of the Rim Country Gazette, the Newspaper of the People. Our fortes are fairness and telling the truth. Besides keeping Arizona's Rim Country and a growing audience of readers worldwide apprised of the issues that matter, our focus is quality of life, arts, heritage, entertainment and culture. Jim Keyworth, Editor

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21, 2017

Death by Euphemism

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How the Forest Service cons us into thinking "prescribed" burning is good for us

By Dorothy Holasek
Snowflake, AZ

So, if you are the USFS think tank and you have to sell the public on the idea that it's okay to sicken, disable, and shorten their lives with prescribed burn and managed wildfire smoke, after 50 years of mismanaging our National Forests, your sales pitch has to be good – really good.

The tried and true technique is to soften the blow with euphemisms by renaming the true meaning of what you are doing and the true effect on public health with vague, impersonal terminology. You start off with “control burns” but, because they sometimes get out of control, you don't want to limit yourself. Then, switch to “prescribed burns”, like a doctor prescribing a necessary and authoritative treatment. And we all know that prescriptions often have side effects that we must endure in order to get better. “Managed wild fires” sound less scary than just a wildfire when, in fact, it's a wildfire that we are not trying to put out. “Managed wildfires” are wildfires that we actually grow by setting more fires nearby.

The problem is that we just spent 40 years educating the public about how smoking, including secondhand smoke, sickens, disables and shortens the lives of human beings. Therefore, it helps to rename human beings “smoke receptors” and particularly vulnerable human beings such as infants, children, elderly and the infirmed, “smoke sensitive receptors”. People are no longer human beings but “receptors” and the life-giving air that they breathe is referred to as an “airshed”.

Despite all these euphemisms, there is still that nasty problem of the smoke. Aha! Just switch the responsibility for the harm caused from breathing smoke pollution to the individual, by convincing him that if he just practices proper “averting behavior” all will be well. “Averting behavior” sounds quite harmless and easy to do like a sparrow darting around in the underbrush. Actually, it represents staying indoors 24 hours per day, never opening window or doors, purchasing and running expensive air cleaners, air conditioning and even taking multiple month-long vacations upwind during unplanned times of the year.

Don’t explain to the public how a person would do this and still go to school, play sports, work outside, drive to work, shop, go to the doctor or church.

To top your strategy off, if the public shows up to a Forest Service meeting in order to ask questions about this ill-advised assault on public health and to suggest alternatives like changing our outdated log export laws, just prohibit any open questioning of the FS in front of the public and force the participants to sit in tiny talking circles with FS prepared outlines and a FS moderator at each table, similar to kindergarten class. Any open discussion of smoke-free, proven and effective forest management techniques must be suppressed. And, for God’s sake, never produce a nationwide USFS public smoke complaint form in case you might be expected to document the harm you are causing to public health.

Joe smoke receptor passed away suddenly from a massive heart attack at age 52 following several weeks of prescribed burns and managed wildfires in his airshed, leaving behind his smoke receptor wife, Mary, and two minor smoke sensitive receptor children. Mary worked alongside her husband in their family landscaping business and, therefore, they were not able to practice proper averting behavior. The children were notified of their father’s death at soccer practice, a non-averting behavior sport. Even though Joe’s family is third generation, they must move to cleaner air because of Mary’s recently diagnosed COPD and the children’s asthma. Joe and Mary loved the outdoors, were avid hikers and lifelong non-smokers.

Every successful large-scale assault on public health has been accomplished with the cooperation and blessing of lots of good people who were convinced that the harm that they were causing their fellow citizens was acceptable in the pursuit of a “higher goal”.

Posted by [Jim Keyworth](#) at 1:53 PM

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