

## Fire News and Advice Nov 2020

### Important dates

**Restricted Burning Period** - Swan 1<sup>st</sup> Oct to 30<sup>th</sup> Nov, Toodyay 1<sup>st</sup> Oct to 31<sup>st</sup> Oct

Permits are required for most burning

**Prohibited Burning Period** – Swan 1<sup>st</sup> Dec to 31<sup>st</sup> March, Toodyay 1<sup>st</sup> Nov to 9<sup>th</sup> Mar

**Firebreaks and Asset Protections Zones** – in both Swan and Toodyay must be compliant from 1<sup>st</sup> Nov to 30<sup>th</sup> April each year

For further info refer to your Local Govt Annual Guide to the Fire Season

<https://www.swan.wa.gov.au/Your-Services/Emergency-management/Fire/Download-Your-202021-Fire-Season-Guide> or <https://www.toodyay.wa.gov.au/Resident-Services/Fire-Information>

By the time of publication of this article, the final report from the **Bush Fires Royal Commission should have been released**. This will make far reaching recommendations, a majority about how governments and agencies should work to **prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover** from emergencies, not just fire. Regardless of outcomes, on a local level, it will always be we the community members who can make the most difference to our safety and survival – we need to continue to shoulder that responsibility.

### **Do you have a well thought out PLAN in the event of bush fire?**

It is YOU that can do most for you and your family's survival. Assistance in developing a plan is available through the Bush Fire Ready programme (contact your local brigade) and via <https://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/bushfire/prepare/> and <https://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/firechat> Think about the possibilities below. On really bad days most if not all could ruin your day! There are no easy solutions, effort has to be put into your preparations for these.

**You may not get a warning before the fire arrives** – except for smoke, embers and flames. It may have started nearby, it may be very fast moving, you may have missed the warning, or communications infrastructure may have failed.

**You may not get help until well after the fire has passed** – for brigades to mobilise takes time, and the fire might arrive first. During larger scale incidents there will simply not be enough fire units for one to turn up at every address and roads may be blocked and impassable for even emergency services. Under the worst conditions firefighting aircraft may not be able to operate.

**You may have no network power supplies** – the fire may have resulted in damage to the network, or failure of the network itself may have caused the fire.

**You may not be able to evacuate, or have a serious risk of being trapped if you try** – fire may have already impacted escape routes, fallen trees and branches may block roads. Even alternative routes may be impassable.

**IF YOUR ONLY PLAN IS TO LEAVE IF A FIRE THREATENS, YOU ARE SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR FAILURE!** – You may be better relocating somewhere much safer well in advance when really high risk days are forecast.

### **What do you do if you see a bush fire, or out of control or illegal burn**

**The FIRST number to ring is 000.** Be specific about the location of the fire, eg street address (not Lot no), or distance and direction from nearest intersection etc. Nothing more frustrating than searching for a small fire “somewhere along Reserve rd”.

The emergency app <http://emergencyapp.triplezero.gov.au/> downloaded to your smartphone can provide GPS data to the call taker when you dial 000, however remember that it will give the callers location, not necessarily the fires location, an issue if some distance away. Caution for very distant smoke for which you can't give a reasonably accurate location, it pays to check on EmergencyWA first as it may have already been reported.

**What do you do for a bushfire on your land** – including if you accidentally started it **Report it by calling 000 straight away**, and then tackle it if you can do so safely. You are required under the Bush Fires Act Sect 28 to do your “utmost” to extinguish it irrespective of the cause if it is on your land, but nobody expects you to take silly risks to do so. Being overconfident of your chances of stopping it and not reporting it delays brigade response and increases the chances of it getting away.

### **TOTAL FIRE BAN (TFB) and HARVEST AND VEHICLE MOVEMENT BAN (HVMB)**

Commonly declared for days when bad fire weather is expected, or if firefighting resources are very stretched due to ongoing incidents. The onus is on YOU to check – penalties up to \$25k/12months. Any act “likely to cause a bush fire” is prohibited, but more details of what is/isn't allowed, and how you can check for bans, are available on the links below.

**Total Fire Ban (TFB)** declared by DFES, usually for a region, and usually midnight to midnight. Lighting of any fires, slashing, mowing, chainsawing, whippersnipping, hot works and offroad recreational use of vehicles, quads, motorbikes, all NOT allowed. If a **HVMB** is not also in force at the time you can carry out certain “necessary agricultural activities” which cannot reasonably be postponed, including harvesting, and feeding/caring for stock and crops. There are some further exemptions with very strict conditions attached for industry and Govt, but NOT for private landowners .

Refer to [www.emergency.wa.gov.au](http://www.emergency.wa.gov.au) and <http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/totalfirebans>

**Harvest and Vehicle Movement Ban (HVMB)** declared by Local Govt, usually for higher risk parts of the day (commonly mid morning until late afternoon) In addition to similar restrictions to those under a Total Fire Ban, ALL vehicle and machinery use or movement is prohibited other than on roads, driveways and parking areas clear of flammable material.

For landholders the only exemption is where necessary to deal with an immediate and significant threat to the safety of persons or animals. Harvesting MUST stop. Refer to

<https://www.swan.wa.gov.au/Your-Services/Emergency-management/Fire> or

<https://www.toodyay.wa.gov.au/Resident-Services/Fire-Information>

For industry some exemptions under Total Fire Ban regs may apply on a case by case basis

**A majority of fires occur due to carelessness, accident or malice.** Except for lightning, few are from natural causes. We all have an important role in preventing fires from starting. Remember though that once a fire starts, the impact is the same regardless of the cause!

**Slashing/mowing etc** – especially when blades hit rocks or junk causing sparks. Also dry grass/vegetation accumulates around exhausts etc. Best done on cooler days or cooler times of day, there is less chance of a fire starting, and if it does it will be far easier to contain. Have a water extinguisher or pack spray on the machine, or nearby if the machine won't carry it. If possible also have a fire unit immediately available nearby.

**Exhausts (and sparks thrown from them) and other hot parts** - make sure vehicles and machinery, large or small, are regularly cleaned especially of any oil, dirt or grass/vegetation. Exhausts must be free from leaks. Cars/SUVs and even some larger 4WDs etc are particularly risky with low exhausts, they should never be driven over or parked in dry grass or scrub which might come in contact. The Bush Fires Act requires ALL machinery other than cars and trucks (and including chainsaws, whipper snippers etc) to have an effective spark arresting exhaust, and larger plant like tractors, harvesters etc having the exhaust outlet pointing vertically unless at least 2m above the ground.

**Not properly extinguishing fires.** Extinguished means with water until nothing hot remains. Leaving to smoulder/burn out, or covering with dirt are not acceptable, as this often leads to reignitions/escapes, sometimes days later.

**“Hot works” in the open air** - you must have a 5m firebreak and an effective means of extinguishment (water, not dry chemical etc). Should be avoided unless necessary, especially on hotter or windier days or times of day. Not allowed at all if a Total Fire Ban or Harvest and Vehicle Movement Ban in force at the time.

**Natural causes** – occasionally from mulch piles and haystacks, but more commonly lightning. After a thunderstorm keep an eye out over next few days for trees which may have been hit. The only sign may just be tiny wisps of smoke high up which will cause problems later as burning continues and embers drop. These must be dealt with properly, report by dialling 000.

**Deliberate** – difficult to stop unless the individuals are identified, often only after a pattern is developed. Please report suspicious behaviour to Crimestoppers.