

Fire Advice from West Gidge Brigade March 2010

Bushfire Readiness Public Meeting – March 17th at 7:00 pm at the Gidge Fireshed.
Refer to the Ad in this month's Gidgegram

I'm sure everyone has been happy with a bit of a lull in fire activity, at least until the time of writing this article. Members of both brigades have enjoyed a well deserved rest after being run ragged for a while.

However this lull in activity is no reason for complacency, serious bushfires can happen for at least a couple of months from now so be prepared.

This article focuses on hazard reduction burning. It may seem early in the season to be talking about this but to be effective, hazard reduction burning should be planned well in advance, starting now.

Hazard Reduction Burning

This will become possible once the Restricted Burning Season commences. Traditionally this has started in April, but in the past few years it has been pushed back due to the late break of the season. Unfortunately last year the seasons conspired against us so the Brigades had a very narrow window to do larger burns.

While the Brigades will conduct hazard reduction burns for landholders, there is always far more demand than volunteer time available to do these. Preference will always be given to larger area and higher fuel hazard areas.

Landholders doing their own Burns – Planning well ahead

Landholders are generally reasonably capable of managing effective hazard reduction burning themselves on smaller areas provided sensible precautions are taken. This is part of taking some responsibility for your own fire protection, and an integral part of responsible management of your property.

The key to achieving this is to have a well thought out **Fire Management Plan** which includes a programme of hazard management and reduction. Plan well in advance what you are going to do. The more responsible property owners actually plan their property management programme, including hazard reduction, years ahead.

If you do all your planning and preparation well in advance, you are then in a position to seize the opportunity on days when the weather is ideal for a safe burn. Deciding at the last minute without the preparation is a recipe for disaster.

Establish your Hazard Reduction Goals and Strategy

- What are you trying to achieve? – usually a combination of hazard reduction, weed control and native plant regeneration.
- Is autumn or spring the best time to achieve these goals? – various native plant communities respond differently to timing of burns.
- What frequency of burning is appropriate to the area and the goals set? Different plant communities require different burning intervals. Burn too frequently and grasses and weeds may come to predominate.
- Are there any rare flora or fauna involved or are you in an environmentally sensitive area? Consult DEC if in doubt.

Do the preparation well in advance.

- At what times of year can you burn? Different restrictions apply in different seasons. No burning is allowed during the Prohibited Burning Season other than under exceptional circumstances. If in doubt ask!
- Will you need a **Permit to Burn**? – yes if the Restricted Season is in force.
- Is the burn within your capabilities? If in any doubt seek advice.

- Under what weather/wind conditions can you burn? Consider the effect of smoke on road safety, neighbours, vineyards etc.
- Are there adequate breaks and buffers around the area to be burnt?
- Is there good access for fire vehicles if things go wrong?
- What fire suppression gear will you need eg will you need some sort of fire unit?
- What backup water supplies are there?
- How many people will be needed to help you? - you should always have 2 fit and capable persons involved.
- Do you have adequate protective clothing and equipment?
- Have you allowed sufficient time for the burn and subsequent extinguishment? It is illegal to leave a burn unattended unless it is completely safe and/or extinguished to specific standards.
- Are neighbours willing to assist? It is good practice to involve them and reciprocate by helping them with their hazard reduction.
- What will you do if things go wrong?

Resources and Information

Fire Control Officers for your area can visit your property on request to give advice and assist you in planning. They may also consider whether the area is appropriate for the Brigades to conduct a hazard reduction burn and if so place the burn on the list. Refer to the contacts on the back page of the Gidgegram.

FESA last year commenced running "Winter Burning" workshops which have proved valuable to landholders. More are planned for this year and will be advertised in due course. To register interest in a course or to obtain a download or DVD go to the website <http://www.fesa.wa.gov.au> then follow the links >Safety>Bushfire>Prepare for Bushfire>Winter Burning for the Hills.