

Fire News and Advice Nov 2016

Important dates

1st Oct - 30th Nov (unless shortened) - Restricted Burning Season - City of Swan

1st Nov - 8th March (unless extended) - Prohibited Burning Season - Shire of Toodyay

1st Dec to 31st March (unless extended) - Prohibited Burning Season - City of Swan

You must maintain your **Firebreaks** and required **Building Protection Zones** from now until 30th April in both City of Swan and Shire of Toodyay

We are moving towards the highest risk time of year. The higher than recent years rainfall has promoted a lot of growth in pastures etc, which once cured can lead to very fast rates of spread and high fire intensity. Please try and reduce the risk as much as possible by grazing or slashing. See section below re risks with **Slashing and Mowing** and also with operating **Vehicles and Machinery in pasture or bush**.

We are likely to see a number of **Blow up** days when risk is elevated and you need to take extra precautions above normal. Expect specific **Harvest and Vehicle Movement Bans** and/or **Total Fire Bans** on some days. Make sure you know how to be informed when these bans are in place. The consequences of ignoring a ban can not only be very serious to yourself and the community, it can cost you dearly in court. Note that ignorance is not a defence against prosecution in these cases.

RU Ready? - really - or are you setting yourself up for failure?

Recent surveys have shown that a significant proportion of residents in high risk areas place too much reliance on warnings as part of their **Bush Fire Survival Plan**. In particular some indicated that they would probably not take any action until they received a specific warning by which time it may be far too late! When an emergency such as a fire starts nearby, and in some cases with large fires when infrastructure is damaged and/or resources are stretched, **you may get no direct warning or help before the fire impacts, and you might not be able to evacuate** - are you prepared for this? Are you prepared to **stay and defend** without any assistance if you can't get out?

If you are not you should have a serious rethink of your plans and preparations. Should you even be in the area on higher risk days? Think about being elsewhere in a far safer area for the day, not waiting for a fire to break out before making a move - it may be far too late!

Even if a warning is received, the information is almost invariably out of date, it takes time to get the information from the incident together into a meaningful form, and in the early stages the info received from the incident will be fragmentary at best. More detail on **warnings** towards the end of this article.

For more info on how to prepare visit www.dfes.wa.gov.au and your Local Govt website, but better still join one of your local **Bush Fire Ready Groups** - contact your local brigade.

Restricted and Prohibited Seasons - what you can and can't do

In a nutshell during the **Restricted Burning Season** permits are required for all forms of burning before 6:00 pm on any day, and permits are also required for everything except a single small heap of garden refuse between 6:00pm and midnight. No burning at all if the fire danger forecast is Very High or above, or if a specific Harvest and Vehicle Movement Ban or Total Fire Ban is in force.

During the **Prohibited Burning Season** no burning is allowed at any time, not even small piles of garden refuse after 6:00pm. Refer to your Local Govt for more details, seasonal brochures or

<https://www.swan.wa.gov.au/Services-support/Emergency-management/Fire>
<http://www.toodyay.wa.gov.au/restrictions-and-permits.aspx>

Drones and Fires - don't even be tempted!

Never fly a drone, model aircraft or multi rotor near bushfires. Even a small drone can represent a safety risk to fire crews and manned aircraft. Due to this risk, fire fighting aircraft will almost always be withdrawn or grounded if other unauthorised aircraft including drones are spotted nearby. Fire fighters on the ground also depend on aerial support to help suppress and contain fires. By flying your drone, you not only put their lives in danger, but also the lives of the people and property they're trying to protect. This may include YOUR family and home.

If you own a drone, do not fly it if there is a bush fire anywhere in the vicinity. If you see or know that someone is doing this, report it to police IMMEDIATELY.

Blow Up Days

These are days considered particularly high risk. There is no strict demarcation, but typically they are days when simultaneous high temperatures, strong winds and low humidity are predicted or experienced. Forecast fire danger is likely to be "Severe" or above. There will usually be a Local Govt **Harvest and Vehicle Movement** and/or DFES **Total Fire Ban** in place.

On "Blow up" days landholders and residents should be particularly careful to avoid any activities which have the potential to start a fire. They should also consider implementing some aspects of their **Bush Fire Survival Plans** in advance. In particular vulnerable people who might find it too challenging or impossible to stay and defend might be better away from the district or at least in a far safer place that day. Note that there are frequently very hot days that are not considered "Blow up" days, and typically a 42°C deg day with light to moderate morning easterlies which die off during the hottest part of the day may be significantly lower risk than a 35°C day where the winds remain strong throughout.

Harvest and Vehicle Movement Bans (HVMB) - issued by Local Govt - the legal onus is on YOU to check -penalty for breach up to \$5,000 but if a **Total Fire Ban** is also in place \$25,000 and/or 12 months jail.

These are often imposed when the forecast fire danger is "Very High or above". They may be imposed at short notice if actual weather being experienced is of significantly higher fire risk than is forecast. During a **HVMB** you are not allowed to move or operate vehicles and any machinery (including chainsaws, whipper snippers etc) except on gazetted roads, driveways and parking areas etc which are completely clear of any flammable material. The only exception is for the **urgent and immediate** safety and welfare of persons or stock and even then suitable precautions must be taken. You are not allowed to carry out any **Hot Work** eg welding and grinding in the open air. Solid fuel cooking fires in the open air are also prohibited. Note "open air" includes open verandahs, patios etc.

On some days **HVMBs** may not be imposed until midmorning so you may need to recheck before starting or continuing with an activity on days when a ban is likely - it may have been imposed since you last checked.

HVMBs are not posted on the DFES website. They are broadcast on ABC Regional radio at 10:05, 13:05 and 14:05 while the ban is actually in force. In Gidgegannup this means 720 AM Radio. Each Local Govt also has means of advising residents.

City of Swan records notice of ban on 92679326, and on the City website **Shire of Toodyay** residents can register for SMS notifications - see the Shire website

The onus is always on you to check whether a ban MIGHT be in place

Total Fire Ban (TFB) - penalty for breach up to \$25,000/12 months jail - the legal onus is on YOU to check

Imposed by DFES on a regional basis on higher risk and "Blow Up" days, or if fire fighting resources are heavily committed due to large or multiple incidents. Prohibitions include all solid fuel fires in the open air (including verandahs and patios), hot works for anyone who does not have an exemption. It also prohibits any **recreational use** of vehicles, quads, motorbikes etc in pasture, crop or bush. Harvesting and limited "**necessary agricultural activities**" can continue only as long as Local Govt has not issued a **Harvest and Vehicle Movement Ban** for the area. However in most circumstances if a **TFB** is in place, a Local Govt **HVMB** will also apply for all or some of the day.

For the full list of activities controlled or prohibited please refer to <https://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/totalfirebans/Pages/TotalFireBanWhatCanIDo.aspx>

TFBs are usually issued from midnight to midnight. They will be notified on the EmergencyWA website, by radio broadcast, and on the TFB info line 1800 709 355.

The onus is always on you to check whether a ban MIGHT be in place

Hot work in the open air - includes open verandahs/patios/sheds

Again these activities have caused very significant fires. Hot work includes grinding, welding, gas cutting and heating. Not allowed at all if the fire danger that day is "**Very High**" or above, or if a **TFB** or **HVMB** is in force. The only exception is for someone holding an exemption under the Bush Fires Act. This is a seasonal exemption which must be obtained well in advance of the fire season, you can't get one on the day.

On days when hot work is allowed, as a minimum you must have a 5 metres clear of all flammable material in all directions, and a WATER fire extinguisher of at least 7.5 lts. A knapsack spray or 9 lt stored pressure water extinguisher comply, but a fire unit is better. Good idea to wet down well beyond your already cleared 5 metre buffer. Best also have someone else as a "fire watch", you might not see that spark fly off into nearby grass or bush while wearing a welding helmet or goggles.

Avoid driving or parking vehicles etc on any dry grass, no matter how short it is. Hot parts have often caused fires. Modern cars SUVs and small commercial vehicles etc pose a particular risk, as catalytic converters on modern exhausts run very hot.

Slashing and Mowing

Slashing/mowing is also a common causes of bush fires. Not allowed during a **HVMB or TFB**. Slashers and mowers risk blade contact with rocks etc which creates sparks. Slashing should be done as early in the season as practicable, and as the grass curing advances it should only be done at the cooler times of day, ie early mornings, and only on lower risk days regardless. You should have a water based means of extinguishment immediately available on the tractor/ride on mower(eg knapsack spray or 9 lt stored pressure) and it is best also to have a fire unit as a backup ready to go nearby in case the extinguisher doesn't stop it.

Vehicles and Machinery in pasture or bush

Restricted or prohibited during **TFBs** and **HVMBs** (see above)
Exhausts from vehicles, motorbikes and quads, and machinery both large and small have caused numerous fires, some becoming quite large. This can be from contact with dry grass/leaves etc, accumulation of dry material around exhausts, from exhaust sparks, and from electrical faults. All exhausts are required to be in good condition and free from leaks. Tractors, harvesters and all other machinery (including chainsaws, whipper snippers etc) driven by internal combustion engines etc are required to have exhausts with spark arrestors. Exhausts should be kept clear of any accumulations of grass, leaves etc. Have a

water based extinguisher immediately available regardless, preferably a fire unit as well.

Receiving Warnings

Landline and SMS - for Bush Fire Emergency Warnings only. You do not need to register. This of course relies on the systems actually working and not already knocked out of action, and you being in a position to receive them. As above don't rely on getting these or any warnings.

Radio broadcasts - make sure you have a **battery powered AM radio** - it may be your **ONLY** means of getting information when infrastructure is knocked out, which frequently happens in major emergencies. Only **ABC regional radio** (eg 720 AM), and **6PR** (882 AM) have formal arrangements with DFES for broadcasting warnings. Other stations may vary in the frequency and reliability of delivery. Broadcasts of Bush Fire Emergency Warnings and Watch and Act are usually made on receipt, and at 15 mins before and after the hour. Other warnings are broadcast as deemed appropriate.

Emergency WA website - www.emergencywa.info. This is a whole of WA Govt system of warnings, available on one site. It replaces previous website warning systems such as the DFES one. Map display and presentation is much improved. All levels of warnings will be displayed. Fine if you have internet, again this may not be available in an emergency.

Other Social Media

Warnings will usually be posted on DFES facebook and twitter, and various group social media will often redistribute them, however best always refer to official sources.

What do warnings mean?

Bush Fire Emergency Warning - when issued this will be promulgated by SMS and landline to the affected area as well as on ABC/6PR radio and on social media. This means that fire impact is imminent and that you need to take **immediate action**. Sometimes it may be too late to evacuate.

Bush Fire Watch and Act - This means that a bushfire is nearby and could be a threat. You need to start implementing your Bush Fire Survival Plan NOW - you should not wait for a specific warning. A Watch and Act is not delivered to you. Monitor radio broadcasts by ABC/6PR and/or www.emergencywa.info etc.

Bush Fire Advice - This means that you need to be aware that there is a bushfire somewhere nearby but it isn't **at present** believed to be a threat to you.