

## **Fire News and Advice - Jan 2017**

### **Important Dates**

Currently - Both Swan and Toodyay are in Prohibited Burning Season

9th March 2017 (unless delayed) - start of Restricted Burning Season  
Shire of Toodyay

1st April 2017 (unless delayed) - start of Restricted Burning Season  
City of Swan

Why the difference? Overall Toodyay Shire usually returns to lower overall fire risk significantly earlier than Swan, major factors include soil dryness rarely reaching the same levels as in Swan over most of the season, percentage bush cover and bush fuel loads, average temperatures and humidity, terrain etc.

A year has passed since the disastrous Waroona-Yarloop fire. The "Ferguson" report with its clear recommendations for fundamental change was released in June, and various further consultations are ongoing. Some minor changes have occurred but the talk goes on about the bigger picture (does consultation = procrastination). With an election due it will be interesting to see the lines that the major parties adopt. Both have committed to a Rural Fire Service without much detail on what that means, but whether it will be truly independent remains to be seen. The Greens (in a media release of 17th Dec) and the Shooters and Fishers (interesting alliance!), as well as farmer and pastoralist groups and a majority of experienced bush fire management practitioners have expressed support for a truly independent RFS as preferred by Ferguson. If you have views on what the future RFS should look like, make them known loudly and clearly to your elected reps and candidates for the upcoming election.

In Gidgegannup we've had a number of fires, most notable the 14 Ha fire (accidental) near O'Brien x Lancewood, but a number of others posed a significant risk. Quite a few were suspicious or confirmed deliberate in origin. Realistically the most common natural cause is lightning, most others are accidental or deliberate. We have also had several from accidental causes, including dropped cigarette (in dry grass), hot work (drilling holes in metal over dry grass), and escaped burns. Prompt response by Gidge bush fire volunteers, and residents and other emergency services kept these to a manageable size. Nearby we had the 125 Ha Upper Swan fire which started at Bell's Rapids. Again Gidge brigades played a great role in bringing this fire under control.

We have had some Severe fire danger days with associated Total Fire Bans and Harvest and Vehicle Movement Bans - fortunately most people have shown common sense not just on high risk days so far but the show ain't over yet!

### **Time to Volunteer? - now is best!**

If you are interested in supporting your community, it is better to sign up to become a member of one of your brigades now rather than later in the year. The application process and vetting takes a few weeks, then training courses and further activities are usually held in the cooler months. Hazard reduction burning in autumn/winter/spring allows experience to be gained with equipment and procedures before being thrown into the front line!

### **Emergency Water Sources - more are always needed**

Many areas of rural areas such as Gidge suffer from a lack of nearby available water for use in bushfires. As summer progresses traditional sources such as dams, soaks and stream permanent pools become less accessible and useful due to drying. This is why there has been the push to increase the number of emergency water tanks along roads around the district. More to come over the next few years.

However these will only ever partly solve such water shortages. YOU can help by making any water source on your property as accessible as possible. Please ensure tracks leading to your dams are kept as clear as possible, and preferably have a clear turning area in a position where a fire unit can deploy a suction hose to refill. Even if it may be impractical to get a fire unit close enough, is there a spot where a portable ground pump can be easily set up? Are your water tanks readily accessible by vehicles ie within 3 metres? Do you have a 50mm male camlock fitting with an isolation valve? This is the WA standard for domestic fire outlets on tanks. Any fire unit should have adaptors for their suction hose to this, and having such arrangements may make all the difference between saving or losing your house.

### **Your obligations during and after a Bush Fire**

As a landholder/occupier you are technically obliged by the Bush Fires Act to do your utmost to extinguish any out of control fire burning on land under your control (regardless of cause). However no one expects you to tackle anything unless it is reasonable and safe for you to do so - realistically emergency services are far better prepared to do this. It is far more important that you ensure the safety of yourself and your family. If you have a well developed Bush Fire Survival Plan, the decision as to the best course of action will be much more easily made.

Where this obligation is particularly important is after the fire has been contained and controlled by emergency services. At some point responsibility for managing that part of the fire on land under your control may be handed back to you. You may be required to carry out regular patrols and extinguish any hot spots/re-ignitions. However brigades should never do this without ensuring that doing so is reasonable and safe under the circumstances taking into account the risks, and your individual circumstances. You should insist on a proper briefing from brigades of what the requirements are at the time you are advised that they wish to hand control back to you. Don't hesitate to raise your concerns if you believe that it is unreasonable at that time for this to happen.

Technically these obligations extend only to land under your control, but isn't this a great opportunity for neighbours helping neighbours by pooling people and resources.