

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

### **Important Dates**

**1st April 2017** - Start of Restricted Burning Season in the City of Swan Toodyay Shire has been in Restricted Season for some time.

**30th April 2017** - Restricted Season ends in the Shire of Toodyay

**31st May 2017** - Restricted Season ends in the City of Swan

### **Ferguson Report**

With the change of WA govt it will be interesting to see how the recommendations of the Ferguson Report and the lessons learnt from previous enquiries are implemented. Let's hope that the recommendations are not watered down or delayed, in particular having an independent Rural Fire Service run by persons with extensive and credible bush fire management experience, in a substantial increase in the amount of hazard reduction carried out, and in reform of the Emergency Services Levy management.

Ferguson also argued strongly for a decentralised structure which empowered communities in decision making and resilience building. We all need to ensure that the lessons learnt so far are heeded, and while ongoing consultation is always required, that this doesn't unduly delay these very overdue reforms. Make your voice heard!

With the restricted season commencing this edition focuses on advice and requirements involved during this time. You need to be fully aware of the requirements if you are doing any burning. We also discuss striking the balance between reporting fires which threaten the community or are illegal, and avoiding unnecessary brigade response. Particularly important is ensuring fires are properly extinguished so as not to pose a future threat.

### **Whether to report Smoke or Fire - Restricted Burning Season**

Unlike during the Prohibited Season, some discretion should be applied when deciding whether to report a fire. It is important to get the balance

right between reporting fires which are actually or potentially threatening the community, and avoiding unnecessary turnouts to safe and legal burns by our Volunteers. During this time, lots of hazard reduction burning will be carried out by Parks and Wildlife, Local Govts, Brigades, contractors and by private landholders.

If you are concerned take a little time to check it out, it may well be safe and legal. This will also enable you to give much more accurate information on location which will be of great help to emergency responders if they are in fact required. When possible make reference to the street number of a property NOT the lot number.

Did you know that in the City of Swan at least, it is an offence to not clearly display your street number if one is allocated to your property. Street numbers are sequential, lot numbers can be pretty random. If not please refer to a direction and distance from the nearest street intersection. This also allows DFES to crosscheck against "Registered" burns - all permit burns are required to be notified to them.

Finally you are unlikely to be able to provide any meaningful information about smoke from distant fires which are not threatening your local area - such reports are common from Parks and Wildlife and other larger burns.

### **How to Report a Fire**

If you see a fire that you believe is threatening lives, property or the environment, or is illegal or being managed in an unsafe manner, the FIRST call you should make is to **000**, NOT to Brigades, individuals, or by posting on Facebook etc. Calling **000** leads to pager/SMS message being sent to Brigades and their members leading to prompt turnout.

Direct calls to Brigades and members can actually delay this response because they in turn then have to make the call that you should have made to get the pager/SMS messages sent out.

### **Restricted Burning Season**

Note that any burning, whether requiring a permit or not, is prohibited if the fire danger for the day is "Very High" or above, or if a ban is in force that day.

Which burns are exempt from requiring a permit:

- solid fuel cooking fires, only for as long and as large as required for the task, surrounded by a break, having an effective means of extinguishment, and must be attended at all times until extinguished
- single heap only of garden refuse (not rubbish) less than 1 sq m, surrounded by a break, only after 6:00 pm, attended throughout, requires an effective means of extinguishment always available, and fully extinguished (not left smouldering) by midnight

All other forms of burning at any time of day require a permit during the Restricted Season.

For details on what is allowed check the Annual Guide to the fire season issued by City of Swan, and similar by Shire of Toodyay. You can also visit [www.swan.wa.gov.au](http://www.swan.wa.gov.au) or [www.toodyay.wa.gov.au](http://www.toodyay.wa.gov.au) for info relevant to where you live/work/farm.

### **Whom to Notify when Burning**

For any burning, irrespective of requirement for a permit, you should ring DFES on **1800 198 140** immediately before lighting up to give details. Your burn will then be registered, so that if someone sees it and dials **000**, they can check on the register and help avoid unnecessary callouts by brigades.

For Permit burns, you are also required under the Bush Fires Act to notify all adjoining landholders (including across the road) in writing delivered to their address a minimum of 4 days in advance (8 days for absentee landholders), unless you actually speak to them and they agree to a shorter notice period. Email/SMS/Facebook notifications have no legal status unless you receive an acknowledgement from the person that they have received it - you should keep a record of these in case you are challenged.

HINT - you can give notice in advance of getting your permit.

Regardless, even if your burn does not require a permit, you should still advise neighbours.

In addition it is a good idea to advise of larger private property burns more widely than the legal requirement above eg by Facebook post on the Gidge Community page. However this does not in any way replace the legally required notifications.

### **Getting a Permit to Burn**

You don't have an automatic right to a permit, this is at the discretion of a Bush Fire Control Officer. You will have to convince the BFCO issuing the permit that what you plan to do is reasonable and that you have appropriate precautions in place.

For Gidgegannup residents - Once the Restricted Season opens you can apply for a permit at the Gidgegannup Fire Station between 08:30 and 10:00 am on Saturdays. Note you will NOT be able to get a permit at the Gidge station for someone else, or for areas outside Gidge, we often have people turn up asking.

For Morangup residents you need to contact the Shire of Toodyay directly, info on the process is on the Shire website [www.toodyay.wa.gov.au](http://www.toodyay.wa.gov.au).

### **When are Permits suspended or cancelled?**

Permits are automatically suspended if the Fire Danger rating for the day is "Very High" or above, or if a Total Fire Ban or Harvest and Vehicle Movement Ban is in force for the area. The legal onus is on YOU to check for any of these triggers for suspension .

An across the board suspension may be imposed by Local Govt due to particular circumstances such as weather conditions or Brigades being very busy with fires.

A Bush Fire Control Officer can suspend or cancel a permit at any time if he/she believes the activity is being carried out contrary to permit conditions and/or being conducted in an unsafe or inappropriate manner. The most senior attending brigade member who may be called out can order a fire to be extinguished immediately for similar reasons.

## **Importance of extinguishing properly**

Extinguishment means using water to cool any hot spots. Covering with earth is risky and should not be done, because this can insulate the hot spots which can and do break out and start bush fires days and sometimes weeks later.

Over the years Brigades responded to numerous out of control fires caused by burns that had not been made safe before being unattended. Usually these had been left smouldering with the assumption that this would be safe. Several of these became larger fires and had the potential to seriously impact lives and property.

During the Restricted Burning Season smaller fires not requiring a permit **MUST** be fully extinguished. Larger fires requiring permits will have extinguishment requirements specified. Usually the stipulation is that it is completely extinguished within 20 to 30 metres of the perimeter (more for burning trees etc) before being left unattended, unless appropriate arrangements re monitoring and patrolling are included as part of permit conditions by a Bush Fire Control Officer.

Not only do you expose your community to risk by being irresponsible in this regard, you could face heavy penalties as a result.