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Title: Veld fire warning issued for Free State

Pretoria -The Department of Rural Development in the Free State has issued a warning to farmers and landowners to remain vigilant during the veld fire season.

Agriculture and Rural Development MEC, Mosebenzi Zwane, says farmers and landowners must ensure that they observe proper fire breaks; burn dying vegetation according to the prescribed methods and ensure firefighting equipment is in good working order.

The first fire in the Free State has already occurred in Vrede in the Thabo Mofutsanyane District, destroying 2 000 hectares.

According to the MEC, South Africa's agriculture is vulnerable to climate change as productive farming is affected directly by the quality of the rainy season, temperature, climate variability and extreme weather events.

"It is important that these implications of climate change be understood and interrogated for both first and second economies in the agricultural sector in South Africa, to ensure sustainable development," said Zwane.

The department said that open air burning during periods of high fire hazard should be prohibited, and that communities establish fire control committees at a neighbourhood level.

To control fires, an alarm system, fire fighting teams and beaters must be organised in advance.

In the event of a veld fire, as a contingency measure, the department said livestock