

## VELDFIRE WARNING AND AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

28 May 2012

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is calling all farmers and landowners in the Free State to be vigilant with the advent of the Annual Veld Fire season. The increasing frequencies of disasters such as veld fires, droughts and floods, which pose serious threats and risks to agricultural production and ultimately food security is a great concern to the country and the community at large.

South Africa's agriculture is particularly vulnerable to climate change, as productive farming is affected directly by the quality of the rainy season, temperature, climate variability, extreme weather events and CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the atmosphere. 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.

The MEC of Agriculture and Rural Development, Honourable Mosebenzi Zwane, is making a clarion call to all farmers and landowners to ensure proper fire breaks, to burn down moribund vegetation according to the prescribed methods and to make sure fire fighting equipment is in good working order. The first fire in the Free State has already occurred in the Vrede, Thabo Mofutsanyana District, destroying 2000 ha.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development offers the following tips relating to wild fire:

1. Prohibitions of fires in the open air during periods of high fire hazard, and the establishment of fire control committees at a neighbourhood level;
2. To control fires, an alarm system, fire fighting teams, and beaters must be organised in advance and plans prepared.

What to do during veldfire as a Contingency measure:

1. Livestock should be moved out of grazing land to unbarred land/ploughed field for safety.
2. Water which generally not available in sufficient quantities or at adequate pressure for the control of major fires; however, sand (soil material can be an effective method of control) or other loose mineral.

The following are a number of concerns and recommendations:

1. The community and households should always ensure that the firebreaks are in place.
2. A firebreak has to be wide enough and long enough to have a reasonable chance of preventing a veld fire from spreading to or from neighbouring land.
3. An owner of the land who is obliged to prepare and maintain a firebreak must ensure that, with due regard to the weather, climate, terrain and vegetation of the area, the following is taken care of in terms of installing the firebreaks (chapter 4 of National Veld and Forest Fire Act NO. 101 of 1998) prescribes.
4. A firebreak does not cause soil erosion and a firebreak is reasonably free of inflammable material capable of carrying a veld fire across it.
5. Farming communities should establish fire protection associations to prevent and control veld fires as required by the National Veld and Forest Fire Act (Act No. 101 of 1998).

6. Removal of alien vegetation, when plant species are removed that contributes to more soil moisture and less fuel that can burn.
7. The Fire Brigade Services Act provides for the establishment, co-ordination and standardisations of fire brigade services. Local authorities, that is, municipalities, are empowered to establish and maintain a fire brigade service, intended to be employed for the following purposes:
  - a) Preventing the outbreak or spread of a fire;
  - b) Fighting or extinguishing a fire
  - c) The protection of life or property against a fire or other threatening danger;
  - d) The rescue of life or property from a fire or other danger.
8. Improved communication among members about, for example, fire hazard conditions. The outcome sought is to achieve better integration of community preparedness, prevention, and suppression and recovery strategies as key elements of veld fire management.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will continue to engage all role players in the agricultural sector and rural communities to facilitate effective awareness of veld fires.

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Issued by: Free State Agriculture and Rural Development