

New association for wildland fire fighters launched



A new association for wildland fire fighters has been launched in South Africa. The Association for Wildland Firefighters (AWF) represents the wildland fire fighting industry and associated professionals in Southern Africa.

“Numerous investigations into some disastrous fires in Southern Africa highlighted the need for a formal body to represent the needs of the wildland fire fighter. The AWF aims to develop the knowledge, skills, understanding and competence of wildland fire fighting

in South Africa,” said Etienne du Toit, chairperson of the AWF.

Du Toit said the organisation aims to improve the standards of safety and the working environment for fire fighters in the sector in which its members operate.

The Association is a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and is registered as non-profit generating or NPO. Any person or organisation associated with the Wildland Firefighting/Integrated Fire Management fraternity qualifies to be members.

Du Toit said when it comes to wildfires, climate change has resulted in a significant increase in risk, not only to responders but also to civilians. “Monetary losses and other damages as result of these fires annually exceed hundreds of millions. More needs to be done to address these risks. This is where the AWF comes in, an organisation that aims to share learning in such a manner that it promotes professionalism, reduces responder and civilian risk and at the same time allows for continuous

improvement in all aspects of integrated wildfire management.”

The new association specifically addresses the needs of the wildfire fraternity. “Until now, no other association specifically addressed the needs of the wildfire fraternity, there are similar associations but these are more focused on the structural fire fighting sector,” said Du Toit.

The founders of the organisation come from a variety of backgrounds, including the fire service/ forestry and conservation sectors and include business development practitioners with vast practical experience in these respective sectors. “This Association seeks to enhance synergies between the various entities responsible for wildfire and integrated fire management and one of the main aims is to professionalise the wildfire fighting industry in South Africa.”

Visit www.wildlandfire.org.za or follow them on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/Association-of-Wildland-Firefighting-101802995515048>. 🔥

- ▶ In the spirit of integrated fire management, adjacent landowners should agree to construct ‘boundary fire belts’ in locations where they will be more effective. With the support and input of the local fire protection association (FPA) or local municipal authority, the merit of alternative locations for boundary belts should be agreed upon, documented and implemented.

If this practice is followed, it will improve fire protection across regions.

Conclusion

The value of a well prepared and effective placement and correct orientated fire belt has been proved many times. Climate change, economic pressure on landowners, political and social interferences is only

a few reasons amongst many others why the losses suffered as a result of unplanned veldfires are escalating in the global arena.

It is becoming clear that modern fire managers must do things differently. We can no longer dwell on expired practices from the past and trust that we will still be able to curb losses caused by uncontrolled fires. Fire management has become a scientific art form where fire managers must combine science, human resource management, technology, good communication and many other skills to make a difference.

By redesigning fire belt systems in our regions, we can move closer to fulfilling the ideology of integrated management. ▲