

Preparation for the Winter Fire Season

By Simon Thomas, operations manager and fire protection officer,
KwaZulu-Natal Fire Protection Association (KZN FPA)



Fire and Rescue International spoke to Simon Thomas, KwaZulu-Natal Fire Protection Association's (KZN FPA) operations manager and fire protection officer with regards to the necessary preparations for the winter fire season.

Thomas explained, "At this stage, preparation is very much as normal, although perhaps slightly delayed due to good rains and we are still getting the odd rain in places. Emphasis, however, is more on awareness at this stage to ensure landowners are aware of their duties under the law."

Explain the impact of the recent high rain fall

"The 2020/21 and the 2021/22 summer rainfall figures have been above normal with the 2021/22 season seeing an increase of some 12 percent in places. During last year's fire season build up, we had very late frosts. This resulted in landowners not getting through their burning programme in time for the cut off dates. Even where burns were done, there were not clean burns and as a result there was a lot of unburnt fuel left. The good rains of the past

summer season has resulted in a further build-up of fuel, which could result in very hot burns. If we once again get late frosts, we are going to end up with very high fuelloads resulting in extreme fire behaviour."

Describe the importance of fuelload reduction

"I think my previous point answers a lot of the importance in grasslands. Very much can be said when it comes to harvesting debris. This is going to be of utmost importance in harvested timber compartments along large grasslands as extreme behaviour in the grass could result in jumps into these compartments."

Maintenance of firebreaks

"The maintenance of firebreaks is extremely important and one may have priorities those firebreaks on the so called dangerous sides of properties going as far as going back and doing touch up burns to reduce the fuel load as much as possible."

Maintenance of pumps and equipment "The maintenance of pumps and equipment is extremely important as well as ensuring that all filling points are

clear, working, have adequate water and are properly mapped and signposted."

Training and refresher training "Another extremely important aspect. It is a legal requirement in terms of the law. A landowner does not want to have an injury on duty (IOD) or the worst case, a fatality and a fire fighter is not trained by an authorised/ recognised training authority."

The importance of FPA membership "I cannot emphasise the importance of this enough and I believe that the benefits of being a member of an FPA, has been published on many occasions. But, needless to say, for the peace of mind and the benefits of having access to equipment and the community assistance, it is in every landowners interest."

MOUs or as we term it, neighbour agreements

Make sure that, through your local FPA, your neighbour firebreak agreements are current and that any changes are updated. This way there can be no arguments when it comes to who is responsible for what and when in terms of your mutual boundaries. ▲