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EMERGENCY SERVICES URGES COMPLIANCE WITH FIREBREAK REGULATIONS AHEAD OF HIGH-RISK FIRE SEASON

The Emergency Services Department calls on all landowners and occupiers to prioritise compliance with fire safety legislation by ensuring the establishment and maintenance of firebreaks on their properties.

The National Veld and Forest Fire Act, 1998 (Act 101 of 1998) (NVFFA), together with the City of Tshwane Fire Brigade Service By-law, applies to all Fire Protection Associations, as well as all individuals, organisations, and landowners as defined in the NVFFA. These legislative frameworks are in place to ensure effective prevention, prediction, management, and extinguishing of veld fires. Compliance with the above-mentioned legislation is not optional, it is mandatory.

As the dry winter approaches, the risk of veld and structural fires increases significantly. Properly maintained firebreaks play a critical role in preventing the spread of fires, protecting lives, property, and the environment. In line with these legal requirements, all landowners are required to ensure that their properties do not pose a fire risk. This includes maintaining firebreaks and preventing the overgrowth of grass, weeds, shrubs, and trees that may contribute to the spread of fire.

In terms of Fire Brigade Services by-laws, all property owners and occupiers are legally required to prevent their premises from becoming overgrown with grass, weeds, reeds, shrubs, or trees that may pose a real or potential fire hazard to neighboring properties.

Within proclaimed townships, compliance includes:

- Cutting grass, weeds, and reeds to a maximum height of 150 mm above ground level.
- Clearing vegetation around trees and shrubs.
- Pruning or removing overgrown shrubs and trees where necessary; and
- Removing all cut or cleared vegetation from the property.

On request, this document can be provided in another official language.

For agricultural holdings and farms, landowners are required to:

- Establish and maintain a safety firebreak of at least 5 metres wide along boundary lines;
- Ensure that the firebreak is completely cleared of vegetation and always remains in a maintained condition; and
- Extend firebreaks around any obstructions within the designated belt.

Emergency Services Department further emphasises that no person may create or maintain a firebreak by burning without prior written approval from the Chief Fire Officer. Any intention to conduct controlled burning must be formally applied for, and where applicable, coordinated by the relevant Fire Protection Association. Failure to comply with these requirements constitutes an offence.

These provisions are aligned with the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, which reinforces the responsibility of landowners to take reasonable steps to prevent and combat fires.

- Emergency Services continues to work closely with stakeholders, including Fire Protection Associations, to promote awareness, improve compliance, and strengthen fire prevention efforts across all communities.
- Residents are urged to act proactively and ensure their properties are compliant to avoid penalties and reduce the risk of devastating fires during the winter season.

CITY OF TSHWANE FIRE BRIGADE SERVICE BY-LAW

Making fires

Sections 9(1), (2) and (3) of the City of Tshwane Fire Brigade Service By-law states as follows:

9(1) No person may, within the area, make an open, uncontrollable, or unattended fire or permit a fire to be made in such a place and/or in such a manner as to pose a real or potentially real threat to any human being, animal, building, premises or other property: Provided that this prohibition is not applicable to –

(a) a fire in an approved, purpose-made stove, fireplace or hearth which is an integral part of a structure;

(b) a fire for preparing food on private premises or premises set aside for that purpose; and

(c) a device for preparing food, which device is heated by means of electricity or liquid petroleum gas and is positioned in such a way that the device poses no threat to life or property on any premises.

(2) No person may, without the written authority of the Service, burn any refuse, wood, straw, or other combustible materials within the area, or have them burnt or permit

them to be burnt within the area, unless the refuse, wood, straw or other combustible materials are burnt inside an approved purpose-made incinerator or incinerating device, subject to the provisions of subsection (1).18

(3) Any person who fails to comply with the provisions of this section is guilty of an offence.

Firebreaks

Sections 10(1), (2) and (3) of the City of Tshwane Fire Brigade Service By-law states as follows:

10(1) The owner or occupier of premises in the area may not permit the premises to be or become overgrown with grass, weeds, reeds, shrubs, and trees to the extent that the grass, weeds, reeds, shrubs, and trees may pose a real or potentially real fire hazard to any adjoining premises or other premises or property.

(2) The owner or occupier of –

(a) an erf or premises situated within a proclaimed township in the area must remove the fire hazard or ensure that the fire hazard is removed by –

(i) cutting to a maximum height of 150 mm above ground level any grass, reeds and/or weeds which may reasonably be connected with the fire hazard;

(ii) cutting around any shrubs and/or trees which may be standing in the area being cut;

(iii) pruning, chopping down or sawing off such shrubs and/or trees, as the case may be; and

(iv) removing all chopped and/or sawn off residue from the erf or premises or ensuring that the residue is removed; and an agricultural holding or farm situated in the area must reduce the potential fire hazard by physically clearing a safety fire belt, at least 5 m wide (measured parallel from each boundary line which borders the premises to the inside of the premises) so that no vegetation or residue whatsoever remains on this belt, and the owner or occupier must at all times maintain the belt or ensure that the belt is maintained in such condition: Provided that where obstructions occur within the 5m belt, a 5m belt is also maintained around those obstructions.

(3) Notwithstanding the above, the provisions of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, 1998 (Act 101 of 1998) and the regulations there-under, apply mutatis mutandis to the application of this section.

Enquiries

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