

fire

managing the risks

for further information about the information in this brochure, please visit these Web sites:

- www.fire.tas.gov.au
- www.asthmatas.org.au
- www.plannedburnstas.com.au
- www.parks.tas.gov.au

The Tasmanian Government has invested \$625,000 to help protect Tasmanians from the threat of wildfires. The program will see the State's three firefighting agencies, Forestry Tasmania, the Tasmania Fire Service and the Parks and Wildlife Service combine their expertise in a concerted program aimed at reducing fuel loads around the state.

Each summer, bushfires in our forests pose a significant threat to communities in rural areas, and on the rural-urban interface. Large, uncontrollable bushfires can have serious consequences for Tasmanians.

In the absence of fire, dead wood, leaf litter, bark and understorey plants build up on the forest floor, providing a ready fuel source for bushfires. As a general rule, the greater the amount of fuel, the more intense the fire. Intense fires are very difficult, if not impossible, to control and they can be very damaging to our assets and the natural environment.

Bushfires are more easily controlled if fuel is not allowed to accumulate to high levels. Fuel management is a fundamental responsibility of all land managers and assists in reducing the potential for damaging bushfires and in making them easier and safer for firefighters to control.

With the onset of climate change, Tasmania may experience higher temperatures and drier conditions, requiring new ways of managing the risk of bushfires.

Recognising that bushfires may become more frequent in a warmer climate, the Tasmanian Government announced in 2007, an ongoing state-wide strategic fuel reduction burning program to reduce bush fuel loads and in turn reduce the risk to lives and property posed by uncontrolled bushfires.

Under this initiative, the state's three fire fighting agencies - Forestry Tasmania, the Parks and Wildlife Service, and the Tasmania Fire Service are using their combined expertise to undertake strategic fuel reduction burns across the state.

The 2008 Fuel Reduction Program

The objective of the inter-agency Fuel Reduction Burning Program is to create corridors of low fuel loads to help prevent large wildfires. The program complements but does not replace fuel reduction burning and other means of fuel reduction close to houses and other assets.

The program will begin in autumn and continue through winter and into early spring, when calm weather and damp forests create the safest conditions in which to undertake planned burns. Corridors of low fuel will be created to assist in controlling bushfires.

Areas included in the 2008 fuel reduction burning program



Depending on weather conditions, up to seven fuel reduction burns are scheduled – in state forests, in conservation areas and on private land.

The strategic burns will provide low fuel zones in areas where there is a significant threat to property. Other planned burns will reduce threats to ecological assets.

HOW MIGHT THE PROGRAM AFFECT ME?

Fire managers will aim to carry out these burns under weather conditions that will minimise the likelihood of smoke drifting into local communities. Nevertheless, it is recognised that smoke may cause particular concern for some members of the community.

Smoke, including wood smoke stemming from fuel reduction burning can seriously affect the well-being of people with asthma, emphysema and other respiratory conditions. Fuel reduction burns are intended to support the greater good of the community, but it is also important to ensure that the risk of irritation is reduced for those suffering from a respiratory illness.

Asthma attacks can be triggered by smoke particles in the air. During periods of high smoke, the Asthma Foundation of Tasmania recommends people with asthma and other respiratory illnesses:

- Always carry your blue reliever puffer
- Minimise the amount of physical outdoor activity
- Ideally, stay indoors and keep windows and doors closed
- Have your Written Asthma Action Plan and all respiratory medication prescribed by your doctor close at hand
- If using an air conditioner or heat pump at home or in the car, set it to 'recycle'
- Try to minimise exposure to other irritants such as cigarette smoke and dust
- Ensure you have access to a phone. Never feel embarrassed to dial 000. It's better to be safe than sorry.

For more information, please contact the Asthma Foundation on 1800 645 130 or your local doctor.

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT WILDLIFE AND PLANTS?

The fuel reduction burns will take place in ecosystems that are adapted to fire. Fire itself is a force for renewal that leads to new growth as food and habitat for a diversity of wildlife. Fuel reduction burns typically leave patches of unburnt vegetation in which wildlife can shelter, and can help to sustain wildlife habitat over the long term.

How can I help?

We can all play a part in reducing the risks of bushfires.

- Don't leave campfires unattended
- Make sure campfires are completely extinguished
- Put out all cigarette butts
- Clean up the scrub, leaf litter, twigs and other flammable vegetation around your property
- Report any suspicious fire-related activity

If you own or occupy land, you are responsible to ensure any burn-offs are conducted in an appropriate and safe manner. Consideration should be given to environmental, social and health concerns. Burning-off in a responsible manner is an obligation of all landowners.

FIRE – PART OF THE TASMANIAN LANDSCAPE

Fire is a natural part of the Tasmanian landscape and it's been that way for thousands of years. Our ecology has been shaped by it. The towering eucalypt forests, buttongrass plains, heathlands and dry forests depend on it for regeneration and over the centuries, humans too have learned to live with and manage fire.

Fuel loads are managed to minimise risk and inconvenience to residents and visitors. While fire is a natural part of our environment, it can have an impact on air quality.

Bushfires play an important role in Tasmania's ecosystems. As these ecosystems have evolved over thousands of years, fire has helped to maintain their health and diversity. Bushfires usually start from natural ignition sources such as lightning, although many are started through carelessness with campfires, disregard for weather conditions, backyard burning or arson.

Tasmania's Air Quality Policy provides the following explanation of other types of fires that can be experienced:

Fuel reduction burns and other vegetation management burns are used to improve public safety by reducing the risk and severity of bushfires.

Fuel reduction burns also provide protection for native forests, tree plantations and private property. This type of burning is low-intensity, with the smoke typically remaining near ground. The smoke can affect ground-level air quality, depending on wind direction. Despite this potential inconvenience, fuel reduction burns reduce the likelihood and potential for large-scale bushfires.

Forestry Tasmania, Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania Fire Service, local Councils, private forest companies, and owners of private property undertake fuel reduction burns.

Forest regeneration burns are conducted to stimulate the regeneration of eucalypt forests (usually wet forests) or to enable the establishment of plantations.

Regeneration burning aims to clear away residual woody materials and provide an ash bed for new seedlings. They are also called high intensity burns, and are designed to generate high temperatures, creating intense convection currents. This ensures that the smoke forms a tall column or plume that travels into the upper atmosphere and disperses. They are usually conducted during autumn months, on days with little or no wind. As a result, such events often have a high visual impact.

Agricultural burns are undertaken as a land and crop management tool. Following harvest of some crops, remaining stubble is sometimes burnt. Stubble burning is quick, inexpensive and can help control weeds, insects and disease. These burns are low-intensity with smoke remaining near the ground.



fire

MANAGING THE RISKS

MINIMISING SMOKE IMPACTS

Included in the 2003 Tourism and Forestry Protocol Agreement signed by Forestry Tasmania, Forest Industries Association of Tasmania, Private Forests Tasmania and the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania is a commitment to minimise the impact of smoke from planned burns and to continuously improve smoke management practices.

The locations of the forest industry's planned burns to be undertaken are identified on the internet at www.plannedburnstas.com.au In addition, information sessions are held in communities that may be affected, and alerts are issued through the media on the timing and location of planned burns.

The State Government's Air Quality Policy requires that land managers and individual landowners undertaking planned burning should use best practice environmental management to minimise the effects of smoke pollution on individuals and the community.

In implementing this Fuel Reduction Burning Program, the objective is to minimise the impact of smoke as far as possible.

For further information on planned burns in your area, please see www.fire.tas.gov.au



asthma
FOUNDATION OF TASMANIA

