

FIRE PROTECTION ON THE FARM

A question that often arises is how fire protection should be applied on property. What is necessary for fire protection?

Every land owner should bear in mind that the responsibility rests with him/her to apply the necessary fire protection on his property. It is an offence in terms of the Forestry Act chapter 19:05 and statutory 7 of 2007 Environmental Management Agency

(environmental impact assessment and ecosystems protection) regulations, 2007, if an owner fails taking the necessary steps to prevent a fire.

Fire protection on property should be planned, if the planning is linked to a fire protection planning in a wider area, e.g. by a group of owners in a district, it will be more effective.

The Steps That Should Be Taken Are As Follows:

1. Determine what should be achieved with fire protection; determine whether it is only the stating of fires that should be eliminated or whether only the spread of fires should be limited. Should fire protection be applied on the entire property or should the crops and buildings alone be protected.
2. Determine in which season and time of the year fire protection is needed.
3. Determine what climatic conditions prevail during the fire hazard period. Factors such as wind direction and wind speed are taken into account. During the periods in which dry conditions and strong winds prevail a fire spreads very rapidly and is controlled or extinguished with difficulty.
4. Identify the hazardous areas. These are areas in which a fire could probably be started or from which it may spread and become a hazard e.g. from a public road that runs through a property, residential complexes and ash pits from which a fire may spread, areas to which

access is difficult and remote areas, areas with thick vegetation etc.

5. Identify the areas that have to be protected. Pay attention to residential complexes, stores, crops on the lands, pastures, areas in which fodder and implements are stored and places in which fuel and other flammable substances are stored. Safe places to which animals can be taken in the event of a fire should be identified.
6. Determine what precautionary measures should be taken to limit the spread of a fire. Such precautionary measures that may be considered include the following;
 - A break can be made along the farm boundary with cooperation of your neighbor.
 - A break can be ploughed around the lands to protect the harvest and other crops.
 - Areas with thick vegetation can be burned under control in goodtime to reduce biomass.
 - The property can be divided into blocks/camps by making use of breaks. The breaks can be used to limit the spread of the fire. These should be 4.5m wide.
 - Bear in mind however, that no fireguard will stop a fire in all conditions. Use a break from which a fire can be fought or a counter fire/ firebreak can be made.
7. Formulate a plan of action for measures that have to be taken on projects that have to be carried out on a particular time (e.g. breaks that have to be made)

Some Matters That Should Receive Attention Are the Following;

- The controlled burning of veldt fires should be completed by certain date. Fire breaks should for example be made by 15 June (winter rainfall) or 1 October (summer rainfall) ploughed or out breaks should be completed by say 15 July.
- The controlled burning of veldt should be completed by July the period for burning will be different from place to place.

- Fire fighting pumps should be in working conditions by say 15 July
 - All equipment e.g. hoses, fire beaters should be checked weekly
 - At weekends vehicles should have full tanks of fuel
 - Fire fighting equipment should be loaded on to vehicles before knocking off time e.g. on Friday.
8. Discuss with your neighbor the proposed fire protection measures and steps to extinguish fires. Neighbors should plan and formulate a plan of action together. Each should know what is expected of him in event of a fire.
 9. Enter into a written agreement with the owners of adjoining land with regard to the burning of breaks or boundary agreed upon or on the common boundary.

Fire breaks needed on the boundary can be prepared together with adjoining owners. The break may, for example be burned on one property once a year and on the other the next year. The break can also be made each year jointly on either side of the boundary if the terrain on the boundary is not suitable. The neighbors can agree between themselves on a suitable place for the break to be made.

It is advisable to enter into a written agreement with your neighbors in respect of the proposed fire protection measures on the common boundary. If however agreement cannot be reached on making the fireguards, local magistrate can be approached for arbitration to make a ruling. The ruling will then be binding on the parties concerned.

In the agreement provision should be made for the date on which the fireguards have to be completed, the width, length, location of the fireguards assistance by each party, sharing of the costs the way in which the fireguards are to be made etc.

If the entire fireguard is to be burned on one owner's property it is not necessary for him to enter into an agreement with the neighbor. The owner who is to burn the fireguard has to notify his neighbor in writing at least 14 days in advance. In addition it is advisable that

the owner has his neighbor or a representative of his neighbor present when burning on the common boundary.

Some Thoughts With Regards To Fire Protection on the Farm

Fires are started countless times in ash pits. Hot ash is thrown out and sets other flammable materials alight. A precaution measure is to fence the ash pit with wire gauze at least 1.8- 2.0 meters. In addition, all flammable material can be regularly in a strip around the ash pit. Also burn the ash pit regularly (in safe weather conditions).

Plan the required fire protection measures in good time. This is usually left it is too late i.e. when there is already a fire or damage has been done.

Determine what fire protection equipment/ apparatus is needed. A tractor with a trailer with a number of drums of water and a small pump working from the tractor's power take-off can be used effectively as a fire fighting unit. Make a number of fire beaters with which the fire can be extinguished. The fire beaters can be left on the back of the vehicle during the fire hazard periods.

Fire fighting teams should be on fire duty standby during the fire season in order to react to any fire incidences in your local area before property, human life and the environment is destroyed.