

Spring prescribed burning season begins in Adelaide Hills

The spring prescribed burning program for the Mount Lofty Ranges began today with a burn in Black Hill Conservation Park, reminding Adelaide Hills residents of the impending summer bushfire danger period.

Allan Homes, Chief Executive of the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH), who attended today's burn with SA Country Fire Service (CFS) Chief Officer, Euan Ferguson, said conducting prescribed burns in spring would help reduce the bushfire risk in the Adelaide Hills over the summer.

"Subject to suitable weather conditions, DEH plans to conduct nine prescribed burns in the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges region this spring," Mr Homes said.

"Five prescribed burns have already been conducted in other regions of the state this spring, with 15 others remaining.

"Prescribed burns are an essential part of DEH's strategy of working with the CFS and SA Water to reduce the impact of bushfires on public land.

"They are conducted for a number of reasons such as ecological and research purposes, but especially for reducing heavy fuel loads."

Mr Holmes explained that reducing heavy fuel loads in parks and reserves:

- provides safer access for firefighters in the event of a bushfire
- makes it easier to control a bushfire
- helps prevent bushfires spreading to residential areas
- reduces the risk of a bushfire damaging public and private assets
- increases the patchiness of the vegetation, thereby reducing the possibility of a conservation area burning in a single bushfire.

"Before every prescribed burn, we carefully assess and prepare to manage a range of risk factors including the weather, dryness of the vegetation and site geography," he said.

"The risks are relatively small compared to the possible consequences of a major bushfire occurring during the summer.

"We always ensure that appropriate back-up resources and fall-back positions are available in the event a prescribed burn crosses containment lines."

Mr Holmes said managing the bushfire risk in the state's parks and reserves was become increasingly important due to the impacts of the climate change.

"Climate change is resulting in more extreme climatic conditions and longer

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bushfire danger periods," he said.

"DEH is continuing to invest in developing our bushfire management expertise to ensure we're prepared for the increasing fire risk associated with climate change.

"This year we're spending about \$6 million on our fire management program, including equipment and training specifically designed for managing fires in native vegetation and remote areas."

According to Euan Ferguson from the CFS, urban growth into bushfire prone areas such as the Mount Lofty Ranges also presented an increased risk for the community.

"Many people have chosen to live in the Adelaide Hills near large areas of native vegetation including national parks and reserves," he said.

"These residents must realise that fire is a natural part of the South Australian landscape, and even the best fire prevention activities cannot stop bushfires from occurring.

"State Government agencies are working together to reduce the impact of bushfires on communities and the environment, but private landholders need to be aware that they are responsible for reducing their properties' vulnerability to bushfires.

"I encourage landholders to refer to our guidelines on preparing for bushfires, which explains ways to make your property less vulnerable to bushfire attack, including reducing the amount of fuel available, as well as what to do if a bushfire does threaten your home."

For more information about preparing for bushfires, go to www.cfs.sa.gov.au.

Background information

- South-eastern Australia, including South Australia, is one of three areas in the world most vulnerable to bushfires.
- DEH manages a quarter of South Australia's land, including more than 300 parks and reserves.
- DEH operates as a brigade of the CFS in managing bushfires both on and off DEH-managed land, providing firefighting resources and incident management personnel.
- The DEH brigade has 38 dedicated seasonal firefighters that perform fire management activities including prescribed burning and fire suppression.
- In 2007–08, DEH undertook 39 prescribed burns and attended 67 bushfires across the state.
- A remote area firefighting team is being developed in conjunction with the CFS, increasing DEH's capability to respond to bushfires in remote and difficult to access areas.
- Fire management plans are being prepared for key fire-prone parks throughout the state, which will help DEH identify, manage and reduce the risks and impacts of bushfires to life, property and the environment.