



Tasmania  
Fire Service

# Farming communities and the TFS working together to reduce bushfire risk



Aiming to provide information to farming communities  
on bushfire matters and fuel reduction burning.



**PREPARE • ACT • SURVIVE**



Bushfire has been a constant and natural phenomenon in Australia for many thousands of years. South-eastern Australia, including Tasmania, is particularly prone to fire and is regarded as one of the most bushfire prone regions in the world. Fire forms an important part of the environment and remains essential for biodiversity and renewal. If uncontrolled, however, its effects can be catastrophic.

While the protection of life has always been the underpinning principle in addressing bushfire safety, agencies have traditionally focused on prevention and suppression activities. More recently, however, bushfire events in south-eastern Australia have seen this approach adapted to recognise the significant role of the community in building a safe and resilient framework.

Everyone has a responsibility to prevent fire spreading from inside their boundaries onto their neighbours' land. TFS encourages people living and working in rural communities to work in close co-operation with TFS to protect life and property during the bushfire season.

## **Fire Service Act**

The use of fire in the open during the summer months is regulated through Fire Permits and Total Fire Bans. The *Fire Service Act 1979* and associated regulations stipulate how these two mechanisms are used. To help minimise potential fire outbreaks, TFS provides appropriate fire safety advice to the community as well as limiting the number and types of fires depending upon weather and fuel conditions.

If a fire starts on a property, the owner or leasee has an obligation to try to extinguish or control the fire as well as calling triple zero (000). The investigation into the fire cause begins with the person whose activity or actions started the fire, then with the owner of the property, or if leased, the leasee.

Where the TFS are called to a fire, the Incident Controller may enter and take control of a property. Once the fire has been extinguished and investigations conducted, the Incident Controller will verbally hand the property back to the owner, or leasee.



## **Neighbouring Properties**

If you are concerned about a potential bushfire risk from a neighbouring property, contact your local council to arrange an inspection. All councils in Tasmania are required by law to issue an Abatement Notice when they are satisfied a fire risk exists. TFS continually works with councils and land owners to ensure better outcomes between neighbours.

## **Fire Permit Period**

TFS will declare a Fire Permit Period for all, or parts of the State when the danger of bush or grass fires is considered high. This is to coordinate and monitor regulated burning of vegetation and minimise the risk of fire spreading. During the Fire Permit Period, fires are not banned but are allowed where there are good opportunities to safely use fire for fuel and land management purposes. Your permit will contain conditions that must be followed; this will reduce the risk of a fire escaping. You will only be allowed to burn during specified weather conditions and with specified equipment available. You will need to notify the TFS when you intend to light your fire and may also be required to notify your neighbours.

TFS encourages the public to register any burn whether it is during a permit period or not. This reduces the likelihood of unnecessary call outs. If there is concern that a neighbour may not have a permit to light a fire, anyone can visit the TFS website for a current listing of registered fires at [www.fire.tas.gov.au](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au) and select 'Alerts Map'. Alternatively ring the TFS toll free number **1800 000 699**.

During the permit period, check the current fire danger rating at [www.fire.tas.gov.au](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au) and select 'Fire Danger Rating Forecast', and consider the risks before undertaking any farming activities.

Other authorities such as Councils, Forestry Tasmania and the Parks and Wildlife Service also regulate the use of fire outdoors because they are concerned with impacts such as public health and amenity. TFS strives to accommodate other community needs as far as possible without compromising fire safety.

- To obtain a fire permit or to register your burn outside permit period, call the TFS on free call **1800 000 699**.
- To view current Permit/Registered Burns visit **[www.fire.tas.gov.au](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au)** and select 'Alerts Map'

## **Total Fire Ban (TFB)**

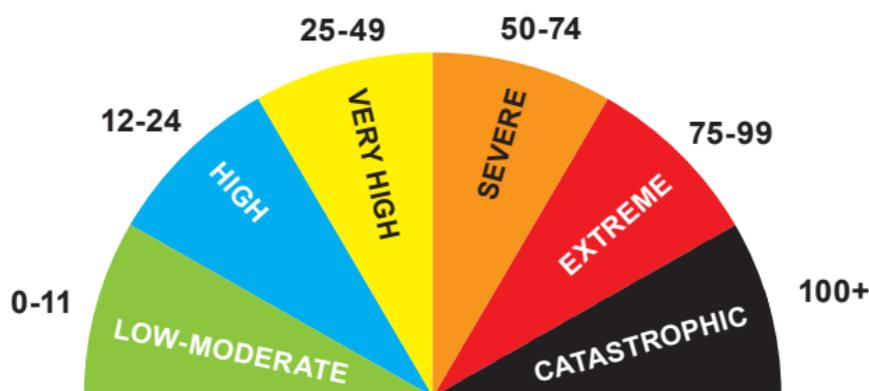
TFBs are the highest level of fire restriction and are declared when the forecast or the actual weather conditions have a Very High Fire Danger Rating at a number of places and/or when firefighting resources are already heavily committed. Usually a Total Fire Ban only lasts for 24 hours. Days of TFB are advertised in daily newspapers, on television and radio, and on the TFS website.

Work practices such as grinding, welding and cutting metal in the open are not permitted. The use of machinery for harvesting etc. may be restricted or prohibited with the declaration of a TFB. This will be dependent on conditions and will be stated in the declaration.

It is your responsibility to be aware of any bans in place when harvesting; however, it should be noted that generally harvesting is still allowed. Those on the land are encouraged to look at and be guided by the 'Likely Harvesting Restrictions Guide' within this brochure. All fire permits are automatically suspended on TFB days. To view if a TFB is in place visit **[www.fire.tas.gov.au](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au)** and select Fire Bans & Permits.

## Fire Danger Ratings

In Tasmania, there are different Fire Danger Ratings (FDR) for different vegetation types. The Forest Fire Danger Rating is the most commonly used, and is indicative of fire danger particularly in dry forest vegetation. You may also see the Moorland Fire Danger Index (MFDI) which is applicable for button grass and moorland type vegetation.



FDRs tell you how dangerous a bushfire would be if one started, based on forecast weather conditions. As weather conditions change, so too can the FDR. Categories Severe, Extreme and Catastrophic indicate a fire will be unpredictable, uncontrollable and fast-moving.

You need to take the time to review and understand the FDRs so you can react appropriately to any FDR forecasts. The FDR will be widely publicised throughout summer. For more information on FDRs go to [www.fire.tas.gov.au](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au) and select **Fire Safety and You / Bushfire: Prepare Act Survive / Fire Danger Ratings**

FDR	RECOMMENDED ACTION
<b>CATASTROPHIC</b> FDR 100+	Leaving early is the safest option for your survival – regardless of any plan to stay and defend.
<b>EXTREME</b> FDR 75-99	Leaving early is the safest option for your survival. Only stay if your home is situated and constructed or modified to withstand a bushfire and you can actively defend it.
<b>SEVERE</b> FDR 50-74	Leaving early is the safest option for your survival. Only stay if your home is well prepared and you can actively defend it.
<b>VERY HIGH</b> FDR 25-49	Only stay if your home is well prepared and you can actively defend it.
<b>HIGH</b> FDR 12-24	Know where to get more information and monitor the situation for any changes.
<b>LOW-MODERATE</b> FDR 0-11	Know where to get more information and monitor the situation for any changes.

## What to do if you want to help TFS brigades fight fires on your property

Firefighters cannot be everywhere, so it is important for members of the community to assist in firefighting tasks when appropriate. Your local knowledge and equipment would benefit

the firefighting operation and by coming on board you will have a greater understanding of the overall picture.

Your decision to participate in firefighting should be carefully considered well before any fire outbreak and be part of your Bushfire Survival Plan. If you do decide to fight fires on or around your property it is essential that you and your equipment are adequately prepared.

If you want to assist in fighting a fire, contact the Incident Controller as soon as possible. This can be done in person, via a firefighter working in your area, or by radio/ phone (UHF channel 12 to log in with TFS, UHF channel 13 for fire ground chat). Once the TFS Incident Controller has accepted your offer of help, you are protected from legal liability and have workers compensation insurance under the *Fire Service Act 1979*. For this protection to be maintained, you need to work under the authority and direction of the TFS during the incident. If you ignore instructions or act outside what you have been asked to do, you risk losing this legal protection.

If you want to help with firefighting operations you need to be appropriately dressed. You should at least be wearing strong covered footwear, long sleeve shirt and long trousers made from natural fibres such as cotton or wool, and head protection (i.e. helmet). If you are not appropriately attired, TFS may not accept your offer of help or may ask you to assist in another way. Individuals using their own equipment do so at their own risk and expense. The TFS does not accept liability for any damage caused to any privately owned vehicle/equipment used. The TFS may consider compensation for damage where there are extenuating circumstances.





## **Safe Harvesting Practices (includes hay making)**

Many fires have started during harvesting. Some of these fires could be prevented by having fire suppression equipment on site and conducting regular maintenance checks on equipment. You must ensure your vehicle is mechanically sound and every precaution must be taken to prevent a fire starting. Operators of vehicles, plant and equipment should regularly check behind for fire whilst harvesting. If possible, avoid harvesting on hot, windy days. Even if a TFB has not been declared, it could still be dangerous to conduct certain activities given current weather conditions. Please contact your regional TFS Office on free call **1800 000 699** for guidance and information.

### **Harvester Fire Reduction Checklist:**

1. Recognise the big four factors that contribute to fires: humidity, temperature, wind, and crop type.
2. Focus on service, maintenance and machine hygiene when harvesting on days more hazardous for fire. Follow systematic preparation and prevention procedures.
3. Use every means possible to avoid the accumulation of flammable material on the manifold, turbocharger or the exhaust system. Be aware of side and tailwinds that can disrupt the radiator fan air blast that normally keeps the exhaust area clean.
4. Be on the lookout for places where chafing can occur i.e. fuel lines, battery cables, hot wires, tyres, drive belts, worn cogs etc.
5. Avoid overloading electrical circuits. Don't replace a blown fuse with a higher amperage one. It is your only protection against wiring damage from shorts and overloading.
6. Periodically check bearings around the front and the machine body. Use a hand-held digital heat-measuring gun for temperature diagnostics on bearings, brakes etc.
7. Drag chains, or better still drag cables or grounding conductors, may help dissipate electrical charge but are not universally successful in all conditions.
8. Use the battery isolation switch when the harvester is parked. Use vermin deterrents in the cab and elsewhere, as vermin chew some types of electrical insulation.

9. Maintain two-way or mobile phone contact with base and others. Keep an eye out for hazards on machinery during the season.

Further information can be found at GRDC - Grains Research & Development Corporation [www.grdc.com.au](http://www.grdc.com.au)

## Likely Harvesting Restrictions Guide

Please note: This is a guide only. Anyone wishing to harvest on a TFB day, must check and be guided by the TFB declaration found on the TFS website [www.fire.tas.gov.au](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au) or in regional newspapers.

FDR	Fire Behaviour	Probable Restrictions
<b>CATASTROPHIC FDR 100+</b>	Fires will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving	Total Fire Ban, ban on all harvesting
<b>EXTREME FDR 75-99</b>	Fires will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving	Total Fire Ban, ban on all harvesting likely
<b>SEVERE FDR 50-74</b>	Some fires will be uncontrollable, and move quickly	Total Fire Ban, ban on harvesting possible
<b>VERY HIGH FDR 25-49</b>	Some fires will be difficult to control	TFB likely over FDI 38, ban on harvesting unlikely
<b>HIGH FDR 12-24</b>	Fires can be controlled	Ban on harvesting unlikely
<b>LOW-MODERATE FDR 0-11</b>	Fires can be controlled easily	No restrictions

## Conducting a Planned Burn

Fire can be used as a land management tool to achieve many positive land management outcomes (fuel reduction, regeneration, weed management, sterilisation etc.).

Before you conduct a burn, you should consider other options for fuel reduction such as slashing, mowing, ploughing or grazing. Also, you may slash and rake the vegetation into heaps or piles which are easier and safer to burn. Your local brigade is not resourced to undertake fuel reduction burning on a large scale, however they may be able to provide advice or assistance in conducting the burn if there is a training or strategic benefit; they are under no obligation to conduct the burn for you.

If a TFS brigade agrees to assist with a private burn, an agreement between you and the brigade must be signed (Notice of Responsibility). A fire burning on your property is your responsibility regardless of who lights it, and whether a fire permit period has been declared or not.

Further information on fuel reduction burns can be found at [www.sfmc.tas.gov.au](http://www.sfmc.tas.gov.au) / **Document Library / Planned Burning Manual for Private Land** or by free call **1800 000 699**.

## Managing Hay

In hot weather dry hay is easily ignited by sparks from machinery, hot exhausts, cigarettes, etc. Another cause for hay catching fire is spontaneous combustion, where moist hay generates sufficient heat to burn, due to a combination of natural microbial and chemical reactions. If enough air is present the moist hay may get hot enough to ignite, with the fire then able to spread through the stack or shed. Land holders should check hay sheds and stacks regularly and store machinery separately to reduce the risk of hay fires. To check temperature of hay bales, carefully break open a bale or ram a crowbar or metal rod into the stacks. If the metal bar comes out hot then pull the stack apart as soon as possible. Be aware that hay can ignite when oxygen reaches the parts that are still hot so ensure you have firefighting equipment on hand when separating bales. Do not walk on hay that is heating as it may collapse and ignite. Signs of possible heating include steam coming off the stack or condensation under the roof. Smoke indicates the problem is serious. Heating may be noticed within days of baling wet hay but can occur 2 to 10 weeks after baling.

## Bushfire Survival Plan

Not everyone thinks clearly in an emergency situation. During a large bushfire, the TFS cannot have a fire truck at every property. It is your responsibility to reduce the risk to your family and your home and take actions to survive a bushfire. The most important decision is whether you and your family will leave early or if you will stay and defend your well prepared home. A written Bushfire Survival Plan will help you remember what needs to be done during a bushfire. Your Bushfire Survival Plan details how you'll prepare and what action you will take if threatened by a bushfire. When developing your Bushfire Survival Plan decide with your family if you will leave for a safer place, which may be to relocate to family or friends, or stay to actively defend your home. Make sure you write everything down. If you live alone consider creating a plan with a neighbour or friend.

Create your Bushfire Survival Plan now at [www.fire.tas.gov.au](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au) and select Publications/Bushfire Survival Plan.

## Health and Safety

Be aware of your physical condition. Smoke, heat and physical exertion can affect you quickly. If you are feeling unwell make sure you tell someone straight away and adjust your activity.

**Fatigue** - Firefighting is stressful and physically demanding. The heat, smoke, stress, coupled with physical work can bring on fatigue quickly. Fatigue can effect judgement and physical co-ordination. Work within your limits, take adequate rest breaks, and tell someone if you feel unwell.

**Heat Stroke/Heat Exhaustion** - Extended exertion in hot conditions can quickly lead to serious medical problems such as heat stress, heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Be aware of the effect heat and exertion is having on yourself and those around you.

**Dehydration** - In bushfire conditions, dehydration is a major concern. You should aim to drink more often than you probably think is necessary as dehydration can affect your health very quickly. Drink water as frequently as possible and avoid drinking cordials and alcohol.

**Smoke Inhalation** - Smoke contains a mixture of gases and particles which are not just uncomfortable to breathe but may also be dangerous to your health. Avoiding smoke is the best strategy; however, that's often not possible when firefighting. Some relief is possible by wearing a dust mask or even by wearing a damp cloth or handkerchief over your mouth and nose. But be aware that dust masks do not provide protection from chemicals in smoke. Smoke inhalation can reduce your performance, affect your judgement and bring on fatigue.

Consultation for this publication has included:

- State Fire Management Council
- Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers Association
- Poppy Growers Tasmania Inc.



Tasmanian  
Government

FREE CALL **1800 000 699**  
VISIT **[www.fire.tas.gov.au](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au)**



Tasmania Fire Service



In an emergency dial **triple zero 000**  
or if a **TTY user call 106**

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