

FIRE PROTECTION GUIDELINES

The Local Authority Fire Services have the statutory responsibility for dealing with all uncontrolled fires, and therefore an important part of planning should be consultation with the local Fire Service. They are willing, within the level of staff availability, to help owners by discussing the best means of preventing and tackling fires on their properties. Annual contact is recommended.

BLOCKS AND AREAS OF WOODLANDS

Although existing woodland areas may be large, new plantations should be developed using the benefits and advantages of fire breaks and good access. It is recommended that new blocks of woodland should be in maximum areas of 5 hectares.

FIRE PLANS

To ensure that adequate measures are taken for the prevention and suppression of fire, it is recommended that a fire plan should be made for all woodlands.

The plan is designed to cover all aspects of fire protection for woodland areas and should be subjected to periodic review. Consultation with relevant fire authorities should take place during preparation and, if required, on revision.

Plans will include maps and details of exact locations for access and water supplies.

Copies of plans should be provided, if required, to Fire Brigades, in order that pre-planning and co-operation will evolve.

Large areas of woodland may require copies of plans to other relevant organisations, eg The Environment Agency and the Local Authority.

Close co-operation should be maintained with any neighbouring woodland owners, and liaison with the local Forestry Commission office. There may also be a need for Police liaison in tourist areas, in order that traffic management schemes can be operated in an emergency.

FIRE BREAKS AND BELTS

These are designed to reduce or delay the spread of fires and to accommodate the movement and access of personnel and equipment. A minimum width of 10m is recommended. Breaks can occur as a natural contour line, a woodland ride, or be created through the process of woodland management. Fire breaks should never be regarded as fireproof, but only as obstacles to the rapid spread of a fire.

Fire belts are strips of woodland with more fire resisting species growing, which help to maintain a clean forest floor and delay spread of fire, eg larch or broadleaf species.

Location of breaks and belts should be based on the probability of fires starting or spreading from known danger points.

Areas of fire breaks and belts should be maintained as required to provide the desired maximum effect.

Consultation with the Fire Service should provide an indication of requirements needed to reach potential areas with appliances and equipment. Consideration should be given to providing appropriate transport to the Fire Service, in areas not provided with access for fire appliances. This will greatly assist in the movement of personnel, pumps and equipment to fire areas. Suitable entrances from public roads need to be identified and recorded in plans.

ACCESS

The increasing use of helicopters by Emergency Services and other relevant organisations will require identification of potential landing areas.

WATER SUPPLIES

The importance of water availability during an accident cannot be overstressed, both during fire operations and damping down.

The location and availability of streams, rivers, ponds, lakes etc, should be identified.

Water mains and fire hydrants should be identified.

Reliance on water mains and seasonal water supplies must, where possible, be augmented with static supplies or other means to ensure a reliability in water availability, particularly in the summer season.

For guidance, one cubic metre of water is equal to 1,000 litres and a minimum useful static supply is 2,000 litres.

All principal water supplies should incorporate vehicular access for water collection. Potential use of helicopters for fire fighting will require adequate depth of water for collection by buckets. Portable dams can be located at secure premises for support to fire fighting personnel.

ENVIRONMENT

All Fire Brigades now have close co-operation and joint understanding with regard to protection of the environment. Early liaison with the Environment Agency, if relevant, is now automatic and may have an influence on the tactics and deployment of resources.

EQUIPMENT

The availability of on-site equipment will depend on the scale and nature of the woodland, but mention must be made to the advantages of equipment immediately to hand for extinguishing small fires. All equipment must be properly maintained. Various types of beaters, spades and cutting implements can be located at key points. The availability of knapsack sprayers will increase the capabilities of personnel. Larger areas should involve the provision of water bowsers, brush cutters and chainsaws. The use of all equipment must be carried out safely and provision of personal protective equipment must form part of all procedures.

TRAINING

Training should be given to all individuals who may be involved in incidents within woodland areas. A clear example is manual workers, but other staff with administration duties may be involved in the methods used for calling assistance. Training should be realistic, safe and involve other agencies including Fire Brigades. The correct use of communications equipment will prove invaluable for a quick and speedy call out and deployment of resources. The benefits of training can be reflected in keeping damage and losses to a minimum.

Practical training exercises should, where possible, always involve the Fire Service so as to build on good working practices.

EMERGENCY CALL OUT

In areas of public access, notices will prove valuable to encourage persons to report outbreaks of fire. Notices should give exact locations and area names. This is important with the increasing use of mobile telephone systems covering the country.

Personnel engaged in patrol or outside duties should be issued with communications equipment, or transport to quickly reach the nearest telephone.

In the event of a fire, the Fire Service should be called immediately. A list of telephone numbers to contact any other pre-arranged assistance from nearby landowners should be maintained by the organisation or landowner. The Fire Service will need to work closely with occupiers of sites, and the senior person in charge of employees must be easily recognised by the Fire Officer by use of armbands or tabards.

The Fire Service is legally in charge of fire fighting operations but will co-operate as required with other interested parties.

On arrival of the Fire Brigade the senior officer should be met and informed fully of the situation and of any measures already put into operation to deal with the incident.

RISK AREAS

An assessment of hazard areas within the potential areas of fire should be carried out on a regular basis, in order that safe working practices may be used at an incident. These areas will be items such as overhead power lines, railway tracks, mine workings or sudden changes in ground level. It is important that pre-planning is used to reduce all risks to personnel.

PUBLIC ACCESS

Where vehicular access is provided for leisure activities for members of the public, more than one route should be provided for safe egress from a particular site, in the event of fire.

EMPLOYEES AND CONTRACTORS

All personnel working in woodland areas must be reminded of their responsibilities towards safe working practices.

Contracts issued for work on land should include definitions of responsibilities and the possibility of penalties imposed.

It is suggested that cards showing key points and procedures should be issued and carried by individuals.

PUBLICITY

The use of publicity to educate visitors is worthwhile to avoid fire being caused accidentally. Talks by employees to groups, organisations and others is to be encouraged.

The use of the media is normally brought into operation during times of high risk. This may also involve an increase in the number of warning signs located on land. Publicity may also be used to restrict access to the public using high risk areas of land.

CONTACT NAMES

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service
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