



# all Fired up

Lowveld & Escarpment Fire Protection Association Newsletter

Issue 50 March 2020

Greetings,

# 50

Happy anniversary to us! Yes, we celebrate our Golden 50 issues of *All Fired Up* this month. Turn to page 4 to enjoy a stroll down memory lane, do you remember these stories? This issue continues to emphasise the critical importance of fuel load management. We know, you know and your staff know but can we ever be too careful and prepared? Australia is receiving plenty of rain yet 6 months on, there are still 60 fires burning. Let's make sure we have nothing flammable lying around with a Zero Combustible housekeeping policy. Until next time.

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## Introducing Our FPO, Officer Petrus Mthiyane

We'd like to introduce members to Petrus Mthiyane, the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) for the City of Mbombela and the Fire Protection Officer (FPO) for LEFPA. Petrus joined the City council in 1999 and has been a member of the Fire Brigade for almost 18 years. As you can imagine he has a wealth of experience and local knowledge at his fingertips.

Fully aware of the challenges inherent in the Fire service, Petrus believes that these challenges are there to be tackled and he is up to the task. Partnership and team work are important to him; his policy is to join hands with all involved stakeholders, develop a strong teamwork ethic amongst his staff and to ensure that the Mbombela community receives the standard of services stipulated in the Republic's Constitution. There are no idle hands in his office, that's for sure.

Safety is a key issue for Petrus and he works tirelessly to ensure that Mbombela becomes the safest city in Mpumalanga, which he says will be achieved by ensuring the Fire Brigade bylaws are in place along with other support systems.



He has a very positive approach to the Department bylaws that are being promulgated during 2020, commenting that this is a big step in the right direction.

The construction of additional fire stations for Mbombela will assist in reducing response time and improve department service delivery in the Hazyview, Kabokweni and Barberton areas especially.

Petrus says that his mission as Mbombela's CFO is to make sure the City of Mbombela Fire Brigade drives the City's vision which is to be a 'City of Excellence'.

Petrus often attends LEFPA meetings and opened the Fire Fighter Day service at the Nelspruit Methodist Church last year. According to Andre Scheepers, LEFPA and Petrus enjoy a close working relationship which strengthens and supports the fire fighting capabilities of the region. CFO Petrus Mthiyane you are an exemplary public servant, thank you.

## Umpiluzi Fire Protection Association News

The Umpiluzi Fire Protection Association publishes a monthly newsletter and we are pleased to share it with our readers.

<https://mailchi.mp/6e4ba64afbba/ufpa-newsletter-edition-0120?e=9b540acff4>



# Make Zero Combustible Your Housekeeping Policy

There are three basic requirements for a happy fire – fuel (combustible material), oxygen (air) and heat (ignition source).

Removing oxygen is neither possible nor a good idea, (we'd struggle without it!) but we can and should manage the fuel load and as summer slips into autumn, now is the right time to critically assess the fuel load on your property.

Johan Louw has introduced readers to the most common alien plants that are invading the Lowveld - be ruthless when managing fuel load and show no mercy to these illegal immigrants that add to the fuel.

The Australian bushfires have brought many interesting landscape design, planning and management ideas to the fore and a new twist on fuel load control. It certainly makes sense, both practical and financial, to design and plant your property to minimise fuel load and combustion sources.

It's an exciting concept to extend permaculture from water-wise self-sufficiency and sustainability to use plants and design as firebreaks as well. Jonathon Engels wrote an interesting article in Permaculture News detailing how to do this. Please note this article is for an Australian audience and the plants recommended may NOT be suitable, or indeed, legal, in South Africa, so seek advice from your local nursery / plant wholesaler as to the correct plants to achieve this on your property.

[www.permaculturenews.org/2020/01/25/basic-design-techniques-and-plant-choices-for-growing-a-fire-break/](http://www.permaculturenews.org/2020/01/25/basic-design-techniques-and-plant-choices-for-growing-a-fire-break/)

## Burning Tracer Belts

Not sure exactly how to burn tracer belts? Malcolm Proctor farmed in the Lowveld for many years and lectured in Disaster Management of Veld Fires at the University of the Free State. He has provided us with a guide to burning tracer belts, so read on.

Malcolm: "The trick with burning tracer belts is to be able to burn them when the surrounding vegetation is green, they may green up again after burning but by then you should have the firebreak burnt. In the event that the tracer belt does 'green up' it's not a train smash as they are not likely to burn because of the reduced fuel load." In a risky area you may consider chemically spraying a double tracer belt parallel to each other. Traditionally, either *Gramoxone* or *Roundup* is used for this, but consult with your local agricultural chemical agent for advice.

Decide whether you are going to use a single or dual belt firebreak system of burning.

In a single belt burn system you would burn the same firebreak annually whereas in a dual belt system you have 2 firebreaks side by side and burn one each alternate year and rest the other. Ecologists prefer the dual system as it is less likely to damage the flora species. A dual belt system also allows you to burn earlier than normal allowing for a "safer" burn.

Malcolm: "We made tracer belts using chemicals 'early' in the season, to kill off the grass whilst the adjacent grass is green, then when burning the tracer belt, the area you sprayed is the only area that burns and there is little chance of the fire spreading. For this operation we only used 4-6 staff to burn the tracer belts."

One also needs to consider the chemical that one is going to spray with. Paraquat is the active ingredient in *Gramoxone* and Glyphosate the active ingredient in *Roundup*.

Malcolm: "*Gramoxone* was the favourite as it killed everything above the ground within 7-10 days of spraying but the roots remained alive. The disadvantage of *Gramoxone* is that it is highly poisonous, the person spraying must wear a raincoat and a mask at all times while spraying; if it comes into contact with the skin the chemical is absorbed and could lead to fatalities.

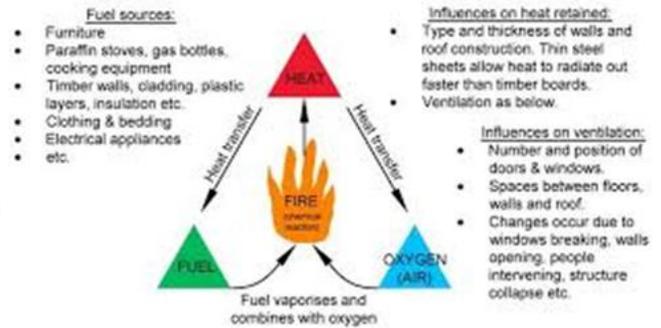
**Utmost precautions must be taken when using Paraquat.** I believe that *Gramoxone* is still on the market but it may be sold under another name.

When spraying we trained our staff to stand upwind of the area being sprayed so that the herbicide is blown away from the person spraying. The other chemical we used was *Roundup* at 0.5% solution; it took about 4-6 weeks to kill off the grass before we could burn. In my experience *Roundup* was one of the **safest** chemicals to use. Its effects are long lasting; however, *Roundup* is systemic - it kills everything even the roots. I made tracer belts on Long Tom Pass and 20 years later they are still there, although now marginally eroded. By implication this then opens the area up for an invasion of weeds into your tracer line and from an ecological point of view I would not recommend it in open veld.

To protect fences, I would recommend spraying *Roundup* under your fence lines (fire damages the galvanizing on wire, which leads to rust). We burned in May or June depending on the altitude and date of early frost. We always wanted our tracer belts made by the end of April for burning in May and had all of our firebreaks completed by the end of June.

Another method to consider is to spray the veldt with molasses diluted with water and then allow cattle to graze thereafter, heavily grazed areas slow down the spread of fire."

You've given us lots to think about, Malcolm. Thank you for the very useful guide.



**\*LEFPA recommends that you get advice from your local authorized agricultural chemical distributor before commencing with the use or application of any chemical product. Read and adhere to the personal protective clothing requirements stipulated by the product manufacturer.**



## Planting Challenge - Game On!

Ja, we like a challenge and when the objective is a worthy environmental one, LEFPA is there like a bear! Chairman of the LEFPA Escarpment Ward, Annalize van Wyk, has issued a challenge to all the Wards to get their mitts on and plant as many *Portulacaria afra* (Spekboom) as they can. This succulent indigenous plant is a hot favourite in South Africa at the moment for it's insatiable appetite for carbon dioxide, gobbling up more than 4 tonnes of the gas per year per hectare planted. With the Amazon under pressure from fires and logging, there is no time to lose in finding alternative carbon sponges and this chubby little wonder fits the bill.



Spekboom is easily propagated. Simply cut or break off a piece of a spekboom, let it dry out for a day or two then stick it in the ground. Give it a little water every few days and you'll soon have a new spekboom plant of your own. Make sure you don't give it too much water or it will rot.

First out of the challenge starting gate is Sabie Star, and what a pretty picture their spekboom makes.

Then we have Maxie Scheepers proudly posing with her cuttings, she's made a great effort and we look forward to seeing her mini-forest in a few months.

Nelspruit Ward owes us a photo of the 20 spekboom they planted in February and the challenge is on, ladies and gents of LEFPA, WoF and all the Wards. Get cutting and planting and show us your efforts.

Annalize is standing by to receive your photos, please send them in via email to: [annalize@safcol.co.za](mailto:annalize@safcol.co.za)

While pride is at stake here, there are no losers in this challenge. However, *All Fired Up* suspects some friendly jibes and leg pulling will be heard at the next gathering.



## Humour Under Fire

Resilient people often use humour to carry them through the worst of times, and the residents of Sonoma County, California, haven't disappointed! Motivational speaker Paul Osincup, evacuated with his family from their home during the 2019 California wild fires, has become a strong advocate for 'laughter as the best medicine'. Some rib ticklers:



"While being evacuated during the fire, I went to the mailbox and found a coupon for discount cremation. I had to laugh, since it seemed likely that nature was going to do the job for free! *Suzanne Shonburn*

"We were among the many in our community that lost our home in the fire, and afterwards we walked around our property looking for things that might have been spared. We lived in a two-story home on a hillside and had a chest freezer in our garage, which contained a frozen turkey. Because the garage slab was above ground, the slab gave way when the lower level collapsed and the freezer was thrown downhill. I came across it, top missing and inside was that turkey, now fully cooked! For Americans, Turkey dinners represent Thanksgiving and in the midst of this devastating loss was a very clear message - we still have much to be thankful for! The turkey story has gotten a lot of laughs, and was a great way to begin the healing process." *Unnamed resident* [www.pressdemocrat.com/lifestyle/8595594-181/sonoma-county-residents-wildfire-stories](http://www.pressdemocrat.com/lifestyle/8595594-181/sonoma-county-residents-wildfire-stories)

Sometimes, an unexpected fire event can in itself be funny, although probably not to this man. We had a real chuckle at this story in [www.readersdigest.ca/culture/amazing-wild-fire-stories/](http://www.readersdigest.ca/culture/amazing-wild-fire-stories/)

A man burning garbage in a field found his blaze getting out of hand. He decided to remedy the situation by driving over the flames with his van. But the man had forgotten a crucial detail: there was firearm ammunition stored in his vehicle. Black smoke billowing from the van caught the attention of a sheriff's deputy on a routine traffic stop nearby. The officer arrived on the scene to the sound of rapid gunfire, but luckily, no one was harmed - the truck's distraught owner was watching the conflagration from a safe distance.

Everyone reacts to stress and trauma differently and watching your property burn is an hugely emotional event, but don't be too hard on those who find their funny bones tickled by the sometimes absurd occurrences that surround catastrophe.



# Our Golden Anniversary Memories

In June 2015 the first issue of *All Fired Up*, LEFPA's monthly newsletter was published; it's purpose to communicate both news and key information to members. While many of the articles cover serious issues, we try to balance the informative with news about the people behind the names and job titles; who's leaving, who's arrived, things the team leaders and their crew get up to both on and off duty; significant international fire events and firefighting developments along with the odd chuckle or two.

Hearing from readers is one of our greatest pleasures and many of you are far too quiet - this is YOUR forum to engage with us so please, send us your news and tell us what you want more of (or less of!) in your monthly read.

Meanwhile, Andre Scheepers didn't hesitate to produce his top 10 memorable items when asked. Actually, his list went up to 16 before the brakes were applied! In no particular order here are a 'few of our favourite things'. Feel free to write in and tell us yours.

In Issue 5 (June 2016) we proudly reported on Orsmond Aviation's first contract with LEFPA. Orsmond has now become an integral part of our aerial team and they are regularly mentioned 'in despatches' as it were. Poignantly, the late Riaan Foley was also introduced as Bomber 70 in Issue 5. This skilful and dedicated young pilot died tragically in a vehicle accident in April 2018 and we devoted Issue 28 to remembering his life.

August 2016 saw us sharing some backyard burning tips, we hope you refer back to those when needed. Issue 8 featured a very excited member who, thanks to LEFPA's support and assistance given from fire suppression all the way to the Supreme Court, won his case against a neighbour. Andre Scheepers is always pleased to share the many 'Thank You' letters he receives for the service, very often above and beyond what is required, delivered by LEFPA and the fire crews both ground and air. Looking back through the archives, gratitude has flown in from both local and national sources, from provincial government departments and ordinary citizens. When people and organisations both near or far call for help, under Andre's management LEFPA gets involved.



We welcomed Ivina and Angela, said goodbye to Corné and Duncan and opened a smashing new Crew Room at Nelspruit Airfield. Strong bonds forged with our USA colleagues have made LEFPA the lucky recipient of firefighting specialists sent out by USAID to train our crews (a first for South Africa) while LEFPA marks 9/11 annually. In August 2018 with heavy hearts we reported the loss of Assistant Chief Ron Spadafora of the Fire Department New York in June. He was the 178th member of the FDNY to die of a WTC-related illness. Issue 20, September 2017, marked the 10th anniversary of the 2007 Sabie firestorm wherein 13 of our own firefighters were lost and a memorial breakfast was held in remembrance.



The fire crews have tested their athletic abilities in marathons and proved they are equally good at cheering and handing out much needed refreshments as well. Come Mandela Day, it's all shoulders to the wheel and everyone pitches in to slash, paint, heave and hoe at whichever project is selected. We've introduced readers to a host of advanced technology aiding early fire detection and suppression.



When space permits, we remind you of the value of your membership and we even have elections - Issue 37 had everyone heading to the LEFPA polls to have their say in who will lead and guide the Association for the next 3 years.

Jaco Badenhorst made sure we knew about fire safety in the home while Johan Louw continues to teach us about Alien Invasive Plants.

More recent achievements featured in Issue 45, our first helistop, and Issue 48, the record-breaking 1000 hours flown.

Ever mindful of a greater power, the service held in the Nelspruit Methodist Church in honour of International Fire Fighter Day was covered in Issue 41.

In between all of this, we've found missing children, stalked rhino poachers and unwrapped the sexy Black Hawk chopper. It's been a busy 50 issues and selecting the best pieces for the newsletter is often not easy but we wouldn't stop producing *All Fired Up* for anything - we're having a good time! Andre is never short of ideas and quietly behind the scenes, Mark Wagner wields a heavy yellow 'minion' seeking highlight pen. The newsletter owes a round of applause to them both, let's hear it for *die manne!*



## 50 Issues in (some) Pictures

How many of these do you remember?



## Activities for the Month - March

- Mow airstrips.
- Prepare chemical tracer belts.
- Update road slashing plan.
- Attend LEFPA meetings regularly.
- Update contact details of all neighbours.
- Train your employees in fire management.
- Check that water points have adequate supplies.
- Finalise a firebreak agreement with your neighbours.
- Draw up an action plan for non-conforming firebreaks.
- Implement an action plan for firebreak preparation.
- Understand the obligations of your insurance warranties.
- Provide / renew the protective clothing for your fire crew members.
- Understand the legal implications concerning your liability.
- Slash burning allowed if weather permits - get a burning permit from LEFPA.



### Important Note:

- **PLEASE ATTEND** the Special General Meeting 26th March at 9h00 in the LEFPA board room.
- Basic Firefighting Training is available to LEFPA members. Interested parties can contact the LEFPA office.
- FDI weather emails and SMSs are available to LEFPA members; contact Ivina for more information.
- **SUCCESS** cannot be spelled without **U**. Attend and participate - we need your contribution!