



all Fired up

Lowveld & Escarpment Fire Protection Association Newsletter

Issue 54 July 2020

Greetings,

Brrr, winter has reached even the balmy Lowveld and while we aren't lucky (!) enough to receive the Cape's wind and rains, there is a definite bite in the air and we need our woolly sweaters. Chilly it may be but the sunny skies and dry weather, combined with the need for people to use open fires for cooking and warmth, adds to the fire risk, so please BE AWARE.

COVID-19 has dominated the headlines for so long, the year seems to have run away with us. We're already midway through 2020 but only a month into the fire season so pace yourselves, there is a long way to go yet before summer rains arrive and we can all stand down. Wear your mask, keep your distance and hang in there! Until next month.



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One for the Ladies



August is Women's Month and LEFPA is proud to say that the ladies may be found solidly making their mark throughout the Association. There isn't an area without the 'woman's touch' so to speak: Dispatch, Admin, Base Management, Fire Crews, Drivers and Crew Leaders, Permits and Pilots and not forgetting, of course, Juliet Team which we featured in the May issue.

Each and every one of the girls has earned her place in the organisation and is a valued member of the team. There are no favours asked or given; they work hard and endure the same tough conditions, stresses and physical challenges as the men.

Ginger Rogers, of course, did everything Fred Astaire did - except backwards and in high heels; while the LEFPA lasses most certainly aren't wearing heels or reversing, many of them go home every day to begin their other job - cooking, helping with home-work and caring for their families.

In recognition of the tremendous contribution made by women to LEFPA and to society as a whole, *All Fired Up* is getting in early to wish them a wonderful Women's Month in August. Thank you for being the excellent team members and colleagues you are.

Bomber 77 'Handwash'

Last month we showed you a photo of Oom Dennis spraying the LEFPA Centre but to prove that no-one and nothing is exempt from Covid-19 sanitation rules and regulations, here he is giving Bomber 77 her daily spray. Seventy-seven is used to spraying fire retardant - being on the receiving end must be a shock!

The pandemic health and hygiene procedures can be tedious for us all at times; imagine going through this knowing that a fire is awaiting your urgent attention. Kudos to each and every LEFPA team member for adapting without complaint. Please be safe out there, guys and gals. This pesky virus doesn't stand back for emergency personnel or essential services.



Ladder Fuels - Size Matters

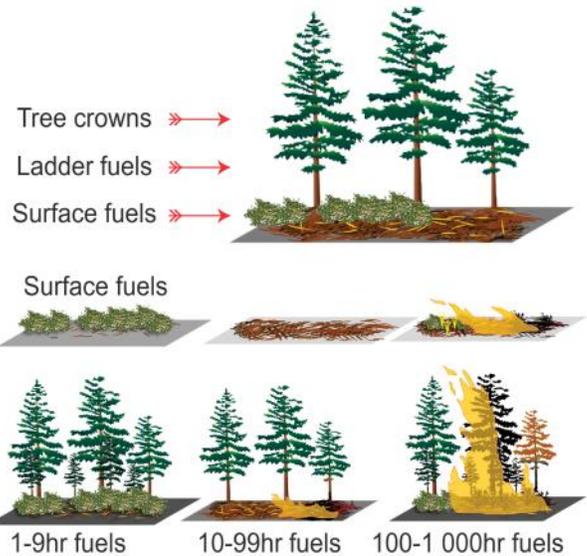
In November 2018 *All Fired Up* introduced readers to ladder fuels, fuels that could carry a fire, burning in low-growing vegetation, to taller vegetation such as tree crowns. Fallen tree branches, small bushes and shrubs under the canopy of large trees create a perfect 'ladder' for fire to climb, reaching easily ignited twigs and branches in living trees and from there into the tree crown.

Removing ladder fuels to separate vegetation types is an integral part of land housekeeping; pruning and removal is an ongoing maintenance task. It's important to know that diverse vegetation responds differently to ignition, length and heat of burn.

Fine fuels such as dry grass, leaves, weeds, twigs and shrubs ignite easily, burn fast and burn out very quickly. Fine fuels are known as one-hour fuels because of the length of time it takes for the vegetation to be affected by atmospheric moisture.

Larger fuels have a higher volume to outside surface area ratio and are less easy to ignite and burn slower and for longer. Logs and fallen tree trunks, usually the largest vegetation fuel, are highly resistant to changes in moisture. Once these ignite, they burn for a far longer period of time and create smoke well after the main fire has passed through.

Keeping the easily ignited, fast burning fuel away from the slow burning forest titans and managing your ladder fuels will greatly assist suppression efforts and reduce the severity of wildfires on your property.



20/20 Aerial Resources for 2020

Andre Scheepers reports that as of 1st June all aerial resources are on standby. The two Working on Fire choppers are based at Tweefontein in Sabie while the fixed wing aircraft are using the Nelspruit airfield base along with a helicopter and the Black Hawk.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, social distancing has been implemented at the airfield this season.

All Fired Up joins Andre and the Board in wishing the pilots and crew best of luck for the 2020 fire season. Your safety and wellbeing are important - take care!



Pilots L- R: Bevin Harris, Cornel Janse van Rensburg, Erick Nel, Craig Hamman



Photo Stefan de Villiers Lowveld Media

Have You Covered Your...Investment?

You could be the most prepared, organised and best equipped landowner in the Lowveld but despite your prudence, life may drop a raging wildfire in your midst. As hard as it is to stand by and watch your assets burn, imagine waking up the next day to discover that your insurance cover isn't what you desperately need right now. *Forestry in South Africa* published a sobering interview with Ruth Bezuidenhout, GM of Safire Insurance's Crop Division in the June newsletter. Ruth cautions growers not to be complacent after good rains, adding that some of the most catastrophic fires ever experienced occurred shortly after heavy snowfalls or rain. In addition, vigilance about monitoring sites after a burn is essential - many recent claims have resulted from flare-ups occurring days, even weeks, after a controlled burn. The Safire fire checklist is a very useful:

- Communication! Collaborate with neighbours and members of the community to create a supportive environment and a well-coordinated response to any emergencies.
- Familiarise yourself with the rules and regulations set out by your local Fire Protection Association (FPA).
- Keep your insurance policy up to date; be aware that timber values may change during the season. Note any changes to risk and communicate these to your insurer. Operate within the parameters outlined by your insurer and FPA.
- Check FDI forecasts daily and only conduct burning when it is safe to do so.
- Identify high risk areas on both your property and that of your immediate neighbours; ensure that adequate firebreaks are in place around these locations.
- Firebreaks cannot be cleared and left; they should be regularly checked and maintained to be effective.
- Extinguish all smouldering material before leaving a firebreak/fire site, particularly prior to a pay weekend or public holiday.
- Test all communication systems, including communication with the local aerial bombing association in case aerial support is needed.
- Train and equip your fire-fighting teams and use protective clothing and equipment that conform to FPA standards.
- Water tankers should be filled, strategically positioned and ready at all times.
- Ensure that access roads are in good condition to facilitate fast, safe escape routes in the event of uncontrolled fires and familiarise all staff with these escape routes.

Runway Inspections Under Lockdown

If nothing else, lockdown has proved how much we take routine activities for granted.

Navigating runway inspections left many either sporting a thinner head of hair or turning what they had a paler shade of grey. Andre Scheepers is extremely grateful to everyone involved in the 2020 runway inspections and for getting the loaders to the runways on time. It took a great deal more planning and effort than usual to get these underway and completed successfully.

Carel van der Merwe from Kishugu Aviation carried out the training and assessments.



Fiery Hotrods



This wonderful graphic was featured in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Fire Protection Association June newsletter. We've all learned something - who would have thought that wildfires could be ignited so easily by vehicles?

These simple, helpful tips many vehicle drivers are probably unaware of but hopefully, now you have read them, they'll become standard practice.

Thanks to Simon Thomas for allowing us to share the image.



Activities for the Month - July

- Attend LEFPA meetings regularly.
- Check airstrips on a weekly basis.
- Ensure Eskom servitudes are burnt.
- Obtain FDI forecast on a daily basis from LEFPA.
- Distribute your standby rosters to all neighbours.
- Advise all staff of call-out and dispatch protocols.
- Complete the burning of your firebreaks as per your plan.
- Study weather systems and check forecasts on the internet.
- Perform daily and weekly checks of all equipment, using checklists.
- Perform checks to ensure readiness and quick reaction at all times.

Important Note:

- 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 spelt without U. Attend and participate - we need your contribution!**