**Creating a safer fire environment**for your horses and livestock

By implementing better land management practices and routine property maintenance, you can reduce the overall risk to your property and animals.

If you live on smaller rural properties, talk to your neighbours and work together to make your pocket of paradise a safer place to be in summer!

**Grass and trees**

Keeping grass height to less than 15cm will usually produce lower intensity fires.

Elimination of weeds (especially woody weeds such as gorse and blackberries) improves pasture, decreases fire intensity and vermin.

Treed areas create wind breaks which have many benefits such as: reduces the speed of fire; provides shade and shelter for animals; and erosion caused by wind.

Shelters in paddocks can provide protection against radiant heat.

More trees can also result in more fuel. Some commonly used trees are highly flammable and can provide a refuge for weeds if not maintained.

Everything burns but better choices can be made to reduce the risk. If possible, try to avoid the following situations:

* Eucalypts with loose bark, particularly stringy and ribbon barks
* Low hanging branches (less than two metres from the ground)
* Cypress and pines
* High leaf / branch density (trees that produce a lot of leaves and branches)
* Trees and shrubs that retain dead branches
* Leaves with a waxy / oil coating

If you already have this type of foliage on your horse property, you can reduce the risk by implementing routine management activities:

* Remove low hanging branches (any less than two metres above the ground)
* Remove woody weeds, particularly gorse
* Remove excess fallen timber
* Cut grass beneath trees
* Remove loose hanging bark from trees
* Remove dead branches

**Storing fodder**

* Do not store hay near ignition sources such as in a shed where you may need to weld;
* Against house walls or under verandas
* If hay is wet or green when baled, the heat produced can start a fire

Water supplies on your property and access for CFA trucks is essential at all times of the year.

Ensure that you have CFA fittings on your water tanks which can be purchased from water tank suppliers and hardware stores:

* Male CFA 3 tread fitting
* Access for trucks (six metres away from tank)

If you have a dam, for best results, make sure it is free of vegetation, is in a relatively flat area with a reliable and firm track.

Fire trucks and vehicles need good access – to improve access, consider the following:

* All driveways and tracks clear of vegetation: 4.5 metres wide x 4.5 metres high
* Trucks can pass every 200 metres
* Gates are at least three metres wide (minimum)

**General property management tips**

* Inspect electric fencing regularly and turn fences off on total fire ban days. A short in a fence will create a spark which could ignite and cause a fire if near brown grass or a wooden fence post.
* Cut grass / weeds around fencing and fence posts, alternatively, use a herbicide
* Check private power lines for line damage and minimum clearances. Areas to inspect are around the connections to the house and fuse box. If you detect any broken, cracked or chipped insulators or wires, call a professional to undertake any necessary maintenance.
* Slash grass early in the morning when the grass has moisture and on cooler days when there’s no wind. Avoid rocky areas and ensure equipment is well maintained by checking bearings, belts and cooling system. To avoid spreading any weeds, clean equipment after use.

**Equipment maintenance**

It is recommended that you have your horse float serviced prior to the summer season because poorly maintained floats, can cause fire:

* Bearing failure – insufficient grease
* Tyre failure – under inflation or rubbing
* Brake fire – brake left on and / or poorly maintained

**Common causes of shed fires:**

* Electrical fault – rats eat wires
* Battery charges – hydrogen gas ignites
* Hot work – grinders and welders emit sparks i.e. do not weld near hay, straw or bedding
* Wood fires – shed heating and flue fire
* Hoarding – increases fuel, vermin and chances of severe fire
* Equipment failure – mobile equipment, pressure pumps etc.

**Common causes of fires in paddocks:**

Many grass fires are caused by the use of mobile equipment which causes ignitions:

* Petrol cars – the catalytic converter touches grass
* Motor bike or ATV exhaust fault
* Falling off bike – hot exhaust touches grass
* Engine backfires

You can reduce risk by:

* Ensuring that grass is kept short
* Avoid driving in paddocks, especially on hot or windy days
* Ensure extinguisher is fitted to your vehicle
* Good equipment maintenance practices and no paddock bombs

**What to do with manure**

Manure on a horse property can accumulate quickly into large mounds of fuel that could burn for days if impacted by fire. Manure makes perfect fertiliser if composted correctly.

Heaped manure presents a low fire risk as a rule. Uncollected manure in paddocks often burns for long periods and can reignite a fire after it has been extinguished.