

Firewise: Vital Information



Sullivan Photography

This information was published in a booklet, “How Firewise are you?” (sponsored by SANTAM) and in view of recent local fires, our editorial staff decided to reprint this helpful information. As the booklet urges: **“Please read and take action!”** Riaan Jacobs, the Overstrand Fire Chief at the time of publication, warned after the devastating fire in May, 2008: “Pringle Bay, Betty’s Bay and Rooi Els are rated as being at **EXTREME RISK** in the **FIREWISE RISK ASSESSMENT**. The Overstrand Municipality Fire Department consists mainly of volunteer fire fighters, so you can see that it is vital that the municipality, property owners and fire fighters work together to reduce the fire risk. **Fire prevention is a far better option than fire fighting!** (Note: While the risk of fire has by no means diminished, names and contact numbers of fire personnel change over time. Residents should, therefore, at all times acquaint themselves with the latest details for use in case of emergencies).

1: UNDERSTANDING OUR FIRE RISK

We live in an *extreme* fire risk region, and due to global warming that risk is rising rapidly! We’re MINUTES from disaster due to a combination of factors:

- * Fynbos burns readily due to its fine and fibrous nature...
- * Aliens (such as rooikrans, gum trees, wattle, etc.) increase the fire fuel load, pushing the fire risk even higher...
- * We have a high-traffic road skirting our villages with the ever-present risk of a cigarette butt being discarded by some thoughtless motorist...
- * ESKOM power lines have collapsed in our gale-force winds...
- * Unfortunately there are always those people who are determined to braai despite the wind...

...and the next thing a spark has been fanned into a raging fire!

Fire Chief, Riaan Jacobs said: “As things are now, in a strong wind, if we can’t get to a fire within five minutes it will be OUT OF CONTROL!” What chance is there of getting to a fire within five minutes? The reaction time of the fire fighting units at Kleinmond and Pringle Bay is ten to twenty minutes, so you need to have taken the required steps to *slow the fire down!*

SAVING YOUR HOME FROM DISASTER

When a 2 kilometre wide wall of fire approaches your village – when you can hardly breathe in the dense smoke, and burning cinders are being swept onto your property by the gale-force South-easter, your bushes suddenly fanned into flames, with the fire fighters nowhere in sight – it is too late to work out what to do! **Everything needed to save your home and possessions should already have been done.** It is vital to be properly insured, but even the best insurer can’t replace your computer data, files, birth certificates, personal documents, family photos and favourite ornaments and works of

art! How much time will it take to rebuild your life? **Obviously we need to do everything we can to reduce the risk of a fire starting, and gain those precious extra minutes that will help give fire fighters a better chance to get the fire under control. Reducing the fire hazards can make it safer for you to stay and defend your home. Begin NOW by removing:**

- * **ALL DEAD VEGETATION from your property and verges**
- * **ALL FAST BURNING ALIEN INVADERS (rooikrans, pampas grass, port jackson, black wattle, gum trees, etc.) from your property and verge**
- * **ALL BUSHES close to windows, glass doors, wooden decks or beams, etc.**

A well-maintained garden will reduce the fire intensity and help slow the fire's progress. New gardens can be laid out as FireWise gardens, and if yours is an established or natural fynbos garden, you should work towards achieving a FireWise garden, year by year.

STAY OR EVACUATE? WHAT TO DO:

Having assessed the fire risk and taken the physical steps to reduce the hazard, plan for a fire emergency. Decide whether to stay and defend your property – or evacuate. A home is more likely to be saved if there are able-bodied people to quickly extinguish small fires on or near the house, but you need the proper equipment and you must be mentally and physically prepared to fight fire. If you decide to evacuate, do so **well before** the fire approaches the area. If instructed to evacuate by the authorities, however, do so **immediately**.

IF YOU DECIDE TO STAY

1. **Evacuate children, pets, the old and infirm, well in advance.** Only willing, able-bodied family members should be left to defend the home.
2. Have a kit of **protective clothing** ready (goggles and a tea-towel for over the nose and mouth to help reduce smoke inhalation).
3. Keep a **fire-fighting kit** in readiness (e.g. heavy rubber fire beaters, a ladder, mops, buckets and garden hose with spray nozzle).
4. **Identify a safe escape route and rendezvous point** should the situation become dangerous. **No property is worth losing a life over!** (NB. Burglar bars and safety gates could trap your family in the home, so be sure to consider these).
5. Ensure that all household members know the fire plan. **Rehearse it now until you are sure everyone knows exactly what to do.**
6. Ensure **easy access and turning space** for emergency vehicles.
7. Check the periphery of your home for potential hazards – remove combustible vegetation and garden furniture.
8. Use your home sprinkler system to help **soak the area**. NB. Wait until the fire is **close by**, as radiant heat accelerates evaporation.
9. Keep the fire extinguisher/s in the house. Bring the garden hose into the house as you'll need it later, and the fire could have destroyed it. **Do not spray water against windows** as they may crack or shatter.
10. Once the fire is nearby, **close all exterior openings** and check the interior for stray embers. **Remove curtains from window openings as these will easily catch alight** if the window glass shatters in the heat.
11. **Fill a bath and buckets** as water pressure will drop dramatically due to other fire fighting efforts.
12. If necessary, **escape from the side of the house furthest from the fire**. Use heavy, wet blankets for shielding. Move to a safe open area with limited fire risk.
13. Wait for the fire to pass before you leave your home and deal with spot fires in the yard. Check for trees, electrical or telephone poles that may still be burning. Douse with water, **but avoid any water coming into contact with electrical wiring**. Remember any fire fighting equipment left outside such as hoses, plastic hose connectors etc., may have been damaged.

IF YOU DECIDE TO EVACUATE

Ensure you do not hamper fire fighters or fire engines while making your exit. Assemble at your designated evacuation area, which, until notified of any new locations, are:

PRINGLE BAY: Pringle Bay United Church, Central/Crescent roads.

BETTY'S BAY; Centre Shop parking area and/or Penguin Place.

Crassula Hall will be the refreshment and information centre and where traumatised people and animals will receive attention, etc.

ROOI ELS: The CBD parking.

Please answer these questions honestly . . .

STEP 2:

ASSESS YOUR PERSONAL FIRE RISK

Under 30 = LOW 30 - 60 = HIGH OVER 60 = EXTREME RISK

| MY PERSONAL FIRE RISK | YES | NO | IF YOU SCORE HIGH... |
|---|-----|----|--|
| Is your property up a slope and/or subject to strong South-Easters? | 10 | 5 | Fires naturally move up a slope, drying out everything before it. So fires are more intense higher up or in a wind. |
| Is your property near a large open natural area or at risk from fires on neighbouring properties? | 10 | 2 | Look at creating a fire break on your property next to the fire-risk area. It will not stop a fire but provide fire fighters better access. |
| Do you regularly remove all aliens, dead wood and combustible material from your property? | 1 | 5 | By thinning out old plants and reducing the combustible fuel load on your land, you may save your house (and others)! |
| Are your LP gas cylinders fire safe and housed legally? | 0 | 5 | Get advice from an LP gas stockist and revise your storage area accordingly. |
| Is your house wood framed or thatched? | 10 | 0 | Keep vegetation less than 20cm high around it, especially on the windward sides. |
| Is your firewood and compost heap well away from buildings and plants? | 2 | 5 | Create a 3 m 'clear zone' around the house. See next page. |
| Have you removed all substantial alien vegetation? (e.g. gums, Wattle, Myrtle, Rooikrans and Port Jackson) | 2 | 10 | Alien vegetation tends to burn more destructively than fynbos...plus the taller the vegetation, the higher the risk of the fire jumping greater distances. |
| Is your hose pipe accessible - and can it reach right around your house? | 2 | 5 | Get an extra tap or hose...and ideally a rainwater storage tank and pump. |
| Do you have any external electrical wiring hanging from trees and bushes | 5 | 0 | Remove or clad in metal conduit now! |
| Are fire hydrants in your vicinity clear of obstruction and easily accessible to fire fighters ? | 0 | 5 | Advise your FireWise committee or Fire Chief, Riaan Jacobs 082 373 8270 |
| Can a fire engine easily access your property and around your house? | 0 | 10 | If your driveway is too narrow or difficult to manoeuvre a fire truck, open it up now. |
| Do you or your neighbours ever burn garden waste? | 5 | 0 | Any burning is illegal without a PERMIT! |
| Are all your wooden decks, fences, etc. treated with fire-retardant and clear of any combustible materials? Are your roof trusses exposed under your eaves? | 2 | 10 | Speak to a good hardware store or paint specialist about fire-retardant coatings. Box in exposed roof beams with a non-flammable material. |
| Do you or your neighbours ever braai without a hosepipe at hand on the ready? | 5 | 0 | The summer fire risk is so high here, always have a hosepipe ready! |
| If someone is running a fire-risk do you advise them how to be FireWise? | 2 | 5 | Please do ...and notify your FireWise committee if they do not comply! |
| MY TOTAL FIRE RISK RATING | | | Redo this assessment every year |

STEP 3: MAINTAIN A FIREWISE GARDEN

A well-maintained garden will reduce a fire's intensity and help slow down its progress. SANBI recommends that new gardens are laid out in 3 FireWise 'zones'... those with established gardens or natural fynbos erven should work towards achieving these FireWise ZONES, year by year.

'CLEAR' ZONE : ± 3 m

No large shrubs, no climbers or trellises on the walls. Use low growing plants and ground-covers interspersed with gravel or lawn.

Fynbos should be trimmed to about 20cm high and all dead plant material removed.

Sourfig spreads a thick layer of fleshy leaves on the soil surface which could delay the spread of fire. **Ericas** and **restios** can be kept provided there is no dead plant material or undergrowth around them.

MEDIUM RESISTANT MIDDLE ZONE:

Mix tall and short fynbos shrubs to reduce fire heat. Certain local plant species like **Bietou**, are relatively fire resistant.

HIGHLY RESISTANT OUTER 'BUFFER' ZONE:

Low growing plants with a high resistance to fire like **Sourfig**.



CLEAR ZONE GROUNDCOVERS

Gazania pectinata
Gazania krebsiana - (red gazania)
Arctotis angustifolia (sandveld arctotis)
Arctotis stoechadifolia - (silver arctotis)
Helichrysum retortum
Cliffortia ferruginea - (glastee)
Carpobrotus edulis - (sourfig)
Carpobrotus acinaciformis - (sourfig)
Lampranthus furvus - (vygie)
Lampranthus bicolor - (vygie)

SMALL SHRUBS

Agathosma ciliaris
Coleonema album - (confetti bush)
Phylca ericoides
Gnidia squarrosa
Stilbe ericoides
Ericas

with succulent leaves

Cotyledon orbiculata - (pig's ear)
Crassula coccinea - (red crassula)
Crassula fascicularis - (klipblom)

MEDIUM RESISTANT ZONE SPROUTERS

Leucadendron salignum
Protea cynaroides - (King protea)
Mimetes cucullatus - (rooi stompie)
Rhus lucida - (blinkblaar taaibos)
Pelargonium cucullatum - (wild malva)
Maytenus oleoides - (klipkershout)
Brachylaena discolor - (kusvaalbos)
Olea europaea ~~subsp.~~ *africana* (wild olive)
Chondropetalum tectorum - (dekriet)

RESISTANT TREES

Brabejum stellaifolium - (Wild Olive)
Cunonia capensis - (Rooiels)
Ilex mitis - (African Holly)
Halleria lucida - (Tree Fuschia)
Canthium mundianum - (Rock alder)

BUFFER ZONE FLESHY GROUND COVERS:

Carpobrotus edulis - (sourfig)
Carpobrotus acinaciformis (sourfig)
Lampranthus furvus - (vygie)
Lampranthus bicolor - (vygie)

BULBS

Haemanthus coccineus - (April fool)
Brunsvigia orientalis - (King's candelabra)

GOOD HEDGE TREES

Rhus crenata - (dune crowberry)
Rhus glauca - (blou koeniebos)
Rhus lucida - (blinkblaar taaibos)
Tarchonanthus camphoratus - (campher bush)
Chrysanthemoides monilifera - (bietou)

**SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL
INDIGENOUS NURSERIES**