



Emergency Operations During Veld Fires

By Johan Jonck

The police, traffic officials and fire fighters do their best to avert the dangers of veld fires and to protect the public and motorists from these dangers. They also control crowds near emergency scenes and will provide the most convenient detour for traffic when roads are closed.

It is important that motorists obey and pay close attention to these officials. The following should be kept in mind:

- Move over when you see flashing lights at the side of the road or the presence of emergency vehicles or fire engines!
- Try to stay at least 200 metres from the emergency vehicle.
- If an emergency exists ahead, it may be dangerous to the public to drive through the area.
- People who drive into an emergency scene may collide with a fire engine, or worse, a firefighter.
- Slow down when approaching an emergency scene.
- Be patient and keep in mind that fire and emergency personnel did not create the emergency, they did

not cause the accident and they did not start the fire

- Detouring traffic may cause everything to slow down, but it is better getting through slowly instead of getting stuck.

Prevention and fire strategy

Landowners and especially hospitality and tourism businesses operating in an area where wildfires are a reality should pay particular attention to the protection and safety of their guests and employees. The proper control and management of spreading wildfires involves an integrated approach requiring a well co-ordinated plan to achieve the necessary result.

Any fire strategy should include the following components:

Awareness

It is estimated that as many as 90%

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of unwanted unnatural fires are caused by human intervention. It is important to know where and when these dangers occur and where the danger areas are.

Prevention

Prevention and control are the secondary steps in wild fire management and follow directly from awareness. Education and the establishment of management systems may be necessary to achieve the desired outcome under this aspect. Educational materials could be provided to staff and visitors. It is also important not to allow unsafe refuse fires, unattended fires or children having access to matches.

Preparedness

The best way to be prepared is to comply with the provisions of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, creating and maintaining adequate fire breaks and to join or form a local Fire Prevention Association (FPA) in your area. The Emergency Response plan should go far beyond showing the shortest exit route.

Should the fire be of the magnitude that threatens the whole area, responsible command should be taken by senior staff knowing local conditions. The decision to evacuate an area could have serious consequences. Roads may be unusable due to being engulfed in fire or smoke, traffic or fire fighting equip-

ment. It is impossible for a person to outrun a rapidly spreading wildfire, particularly uphill.

Characteristics of a well co-coordinated response

- The dedicated fire management team must be alerted immediately with appropriate staff and guests also alerted and marshalled to a safe assembly or evacuation point.
- A head count should be made and reconciled with visitors and staff records.
- Evacuation vehicles on standby in a separate safe area to evacuate guests if necessary.
- Rapid deployment of fire fighting resources within the structure of pre-planned emergency procedures.
- Communications to the local Fire Prevention Association or Fire Services.
- Thatch roofs, buildings and the vegetation in surrounding areas should be drenched.
- Surplus combustible materials should be removed

wherever possible.

- Emergency medical resources should be placed on stand by.
- Progress of fire fighting endeavors to be monitored and communicated via a radio system.
- Careful watch should be directed on the fire out flanking fire fighters or fresh fire fronts being created.
- Suppressed fires should be observed for re-ignition.

Golden guidelines to conclude

- If you cannot see -don't drive!
- Try to move away from the vicinity of veld and forest fires
- Respect and obey the guidance of fire, emergency and traffic officials
- Do not be the cause of this life threatening danger - Do not throw away burning cigarette ends!
- Do not leave an open fire unattended.
- If you see someone playing carelessly with fire, then tell them to stop. ●