

CFS FACT SHEET

FUEL BREAKS



It is recommended that landholders carry out seasonal fuel reduction programs to maintain a defensible space between your home and property and the surrounding bushland and grassland. One simple rule guides all fire prevention planning on farms, rural properties, hobby farms and hills properties: 'reduce the fuel and the threat is reduced'.

A fuel break is an area where vegetation has been removed or modified to reduce the risk of bushfires starting and to assist in reducing the intensity and rate of spread of bushfires should one start. Fuel breaks provide protection from the fire for people, equipment and property, and provide an edge from which fire crews can undertake fire suppression or prescribed burning activities.

All assets including buildings, stock, fences and fodder resources need areas around them where dry grass, undergrowth and dead branches and leaves are reduced in quantity or are removed.

Types:

- Grazing of selected areas is very effective in reducing vegetation around buildings and fodder reserves. Maintain 70% ground cover if possible and aim to reduce the height of dry pasture to less than 4cm by the end of March.
- Ploughing and harrowing can produce excellent fuel breaks if established early. Late workings can kill vegetation. Care needs to be taken on steep slopes, light soils or windy areas to prevent soil erosion.
- Slashing or mowing is an economical method, provided the cut material is removed or allowed to rot down well before summer. These breaks will need maintaining by grazing or mowing.
- Herbicides can be sprayed in areas where other methods of fuel reduction may be difficult, such as around buildings, sheds, alongside fence lines and around fuel supplies. Spraying needs to be done after the autumn break or at the end of winter to be effective on actively growing plants. Check regrowth of sprayed fuel breaks and re-do if necessary with a plough, slasher or boom spray.



Grazing of selected areas is very effective in reducing ground fuel vegetation.



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PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.



Property Protection:

Home

- Prepare a 20 - metre defensible space around the home by cutting long grass, removing dead vegetation and pruning lower limbs of established trees to provide a vertical fuel break, to reduce the danger from radiant heat, flame contact and sparks.
- Fodder crops such as lucerne, the household vegetable garden, mown lawns or wide paths can provide an excellent fuel break around the home.
- If you are concerned that the bushfire risk from native vegetation in the vicinity of your home you should obtain a copy of the 'Guide to the Management of Native Vegetation to Reduce the Impact of Bushfire' to work out what you can do to manage the risk. The Guide and application forms for obtaining clearance approval are available from the CFS website (www.cfs.sa.gov.au).

Buildings/Sheds

- Buildings and sheds used for storage of valuable equipment are often important to the livelihood of the landholder and it is important that appropriate bushfire protection measures are undertaken to protect these assets.
- As a minimum, a fuel break of at least 5 metres wide should be put in place around buildings/sheds. This break could be prepared by grazing, slashing, mowing, ploughing or spraying herbicide.
- A defensible space could also be created for buildings and sheds by appropriate vegetation management. The 'Guide to the Management of Native Vegetation to Reduce the Impact of Bushfire' should be referred to where this involves the removal of native vegetation.
- Ensure you have suitable and sufficient insurance to replace required sheds and contents.

Livestock

- Prepare and maintain fuel - reduced areas onto which stock can be moved and held during a bushfire.
- Plan to use a safe area if threatened by fire, e.g. green feed, fallow paddocks, well grazed holding paddocks, raceways, stockyards, irrigated pasture or summer crops.
- Plan how to look after stock in the event that all feed is lost i.e. water and emergency food and agistment arrangements.

Fences

- Prepare a 5 - metre fuel break along all fence lines with bare gaps at intervals under the fence line by spraying, slashing, mowing or ploughing.
- Insurance – it is possible to lose all fences so ensure you have sufficient insurance to replace the minimum.

Fodder Reserves

- Clear or spray, graze, slash, mow or plough fuel breaks around all haystacks and haysheds.
- Surround all fodder reserves with a further 20 - metre fuel reduced strip either irrigated, mown, bared (through grazing or spraying) or ploughed. Do not attempt to burn-off.

Fuel/Chemical Supplies

- Prepare a 5 - metre fuel break around all fully enclosed clearly labelled sheds.

Crops

- Prepare a 5 - metre mechanical fuel break around all crops and a mechanical fuel break behind the first lap of the header.
- Locate farm machinery on a cleared/ploughed area away from adjacent crops when not being used during harvesting operations.

- Specific farming practices with potential to reduce fire risk are further outlined in a Bushfire CRC research paper 'A review of the effect of farming practices, including continuous cropping, minimum tillage and direct drilling, on bushfire risk and prevention'. This is available at: http://www.safecom.sa.gov.au/site/initiatives_and_reviews/wangary_bushfires/wangary_bushfire_recommendations_progress.jsp

Machinery

- Prepare an area to move machinery to (shed or cleared area).
- Plan the priority of which machinery you would save in the event of a bushfire.
- Have suitable and sufficient insurance for your machinery.

Native Vegetation and Fuel Breaks

The Native Vegetation Council has developed a fact sheet in conjunction with the CFS which provides further information as to what can be cleared without approval and how you can apply for approvals. This is available at www.nvc.sa.gov.au or www.cfs.sa.gov.au.

Further information can be obtained from: www.cfs.sa.gov.au or SA CFS, GPO Box 2468, Adelaide, SA 5001. 08 8463 4200.