

South Australian Country Fire Service

VEGETATION PILE BURNING

CODE OF PRACTICE

**A guide to
assist in the
practice of safe
vegetation pile
burning outside
of the fire danger
season**

April 2015



Government
of South Australia



Foreword:

The practice of “vegetation pile burning” has been undertaken for many years and is a very effective way to dispose of accumulated vegetation waste in the rural setting.

Over the years the practice of vegetation pile burning has led to the start of numerous fires. The main cause of uncontrolled fires from vegetation pile burning has been from a lack of planning and preparation and inappropriate burning techniques for the environment in which it is conducted.

All vegetation pile burning must also comply with any requirements set out in the *Environmental Protection Act 1993* and *Environmental Protection Regulations 2009* as amended and in particular the *Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) burning policy September 2003*

When reading and applying this document, reference should always be made to the relevant guidelines issued and endorsed by any relevant Bushfire Management Committee or Local Council.

Code History

1 GENERAL

1.1 Scope:

This code applies to all persons undertaking the practice known as “vegetation pile burning”.

This Code provides guidance for the burning of vegetation piles outside of the declared Fire Danger Season. Burning during the Fire Danger Season, and on a Total Fire Ban day, is subject to the provisions of the Fire and Emergency Services Act, 2005 and the Fire and Emergency Services Regulations.

This Code does not apply to persons undertaking burning for commercial forestry, horticultural or viticultural operations.

1.2 Abbreviations:

- **COP** Code of Practice
- **FES Act 2005** Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005

1.3 Definitions

- **Vegetation Pile Burning** – The burning of heaped or piled vegetation. This does not include the burning of rubbish or domestic wastes.
- **A portable water spray in good working order** – Is a portable water spray device that is designed to be used for fire fighting operations and maintained to the appropriate Australian Standard. This may also include a Farm Fire Unit or suitable trailer mounted water tank, hose and pump.
- **In the open** – Any area that is not enclosed by 4 walls and a roof (walls and roof sealed).
- **At Hand** – objects would be considered at hand if a person was to take less than 5 steps to reach the object
- **A person who is able to control** – A person

who is not under the effect of any alcohol or drugs and of an age and physical ability that they can take reasonable steps to control the prescribed equipment or any fire that may result from the prescribed equipment being used.

- **Fire Danger Season** – a period defined under the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005* which may be declared by the CFS Chief Officer for the prohibition and restriction on the use of fire and prescribed equipment in the open. The dates of the Fire Danger Season for each of the 15 Fire Ban Districts are determined each year and are published in the Government gazette and on the CFS website (www.cfs.sa.gov.au). The dates generally fall between the 1st of November and the 30th of April.
- **Flammable materials** – Is all vegetation, bush or grasses that may be ignited by sparks and embers. Paper, cardboard and domestic wastes are also flammable materials.
- **Total Fire Ban** – the CFS Chief Officer may at any time of the year impose a ban on the lighting and maintaining of fires in the open for any purpose on a specified day or days, or during any specified part or parts of a day or days, throughout the whole State, or any specified part of the State. The lighting or maintaining of a fire in the open on a Total Fire Ban day is not allowed unless a permit under the *Fire and Emergency Services Act* has been issued.

1.4 References:

- AS 1841.2-1997 – *Portable Fire Extinguishers – Specific requirements for Water Type Extinguishers*
- AS 1851.1-1995 – *Maintenance of Fire Protection Equipment – Portable Fire Equipment – portable fire extinguishers and Fire Blankets.*
- *Fire and Emergency Service Act 2005*
- *Fire and Emergency Services Regulations 2005*
- *Environmental Protection Act 1993*
- *Environmental Protection Regulations 2009*
- *Environmental Protection Agency Burning Policy – September 2003*

1.5 General:

1.5.1 During the Fire Danger Season:

The lighting and maintaining of vegetation pile fires during the Fire Danger Season is not allowed unless a permit has been issued by the relevant local council or the CFS.

Therefore a permit is required for all vegetation pile burning during the Fire Danger Season

1.5.2 Total Fire Ban Days:

Total Fire Bans are declared by CFS on days of predicted Severe, Extreme and Catastrophic fire weather days. The practice of vegetation pile burning is NOT permitted on days declared as a Total Fire Ban.

Any vegetation pile that is still smouldering from a previous day's burn is an illegal fire unless a Schedule 10 Permit under the Fire and Emergency Services Act has been issued. Without such a permit the landowner is open to prosecution if a Total Fire Ban is declared.

A Schedule 10 Permit may be applied for through your local council but there is no guarantee that such a permit will be issued. Check with your local council to find out if they are likely to issue a permit for this activity

2 CODE OF PRACTICE:

2.1 Approvals

2.1.1 A person must not burn any vegetation piles unless they have obtained the relevant approvals/permits to do so and should consult with the local Council to determine what approvals are required.

2.2 Construction of Piles

2.2.1 Vegetation piles for burning must only be comprised of vegetation from the locality, not household or building material such as plastics, wooden pallets or cardboard boxes, treated timber or tyres.

2.2.2 All materials to be burn should be dead and completely dry. No Green material should be burnt.

2.2.3 All vegetation piles to be burnt should have a cleared break of at least 4m from any other flammable material including grass, logs and tree stumps. Greater distances may be required if the piles are larger.

2.2.4 Construct long and wide vegetation piles rather than excessively high piles. Vegetation piles that are too big produce too much heat. A good size vegetation pile is 0.5 metres high and 2 metres wide or long, maximum height should not exceed 1.5 metres.

2.2.5 Large logs (over 150mm in diameter) should not be added to vegetation piles as these may take longer to burn and can smoulder for a long period or may be difficult to fully extinguish. If you are planning to burn logs in excess of 150mm in diameter you must consider the amount of time it will take to fully burn them and you will need to ensure they are safe during hot windy weather. It is illegal to maintain these fires during the Fire Danger Season, or on a Total Fire ban day, unless you have obtained the appropriate permit from your local council.

2.2.6 Vegetation piles should be located well away from assets, including buildings, vehicles and fences on your and your neighbour's property as the radiant heat produced from the burn may cause damage.

2.2.7 Locate vegetation piles in the open and away from overhanging branches that might ignite. All vegetation piles should be located on flat ground and in an area with easy access for any fire appliances, should they be required to attend.

2.2.8 Locate vegetation piles at least 10 metres away from overhanging power lines or telephone cables.

2.2.9 If practical, place the vegetation pile in an area where it will get direct sunlight. This will allow the pile to dry out prior to burning and emit less smoke while burning.

2.2.10 Ensure there is no wildlife taking refuge in your vegetation pile before burning. Be aware that vegetation piles are a favourite home for various species of snakes, lizards and small mammals. Seek advice from your local Animal Welfare organisation on how to carry this out.

2.2.11 Review the forecasted weather conditions for both the day of the burn and the following few days and if there is a possibility that there are high temperatures or high winds on any of these days consider postponing your burn to a more favourable period.

2.2.12 Be aware of the forecasted wind directions and ensure that any smoke produced does not impact upon other people or roads

2.3 Notifications

2.3.1 Give your neighbours as much notice of your proposed burn as possible.

2.4 Burning Safety Measures

2.4.1 Before lighting your vegetation pile, ensure that you have all of your suitable tools, equipment and personal safety equipment to conduct your burn in order to control any possible spot fires.

2.4.2 Ensure that you have the ability to contact emergency services by calling 000 immediately if required to do so

2.4.3 Ensure you have adequate water supplies on hand to extinguish the burn. Ensure you have a hose that can reach the vegetation pile and all of the way around the pile and have tested your water supply.

2.4.4 Never use accelerants to start your vegetation pile burn, this may result in injury to yourself or others.

2.4.5 Ensure your burn area has a 4m clearance of all flammable material or a greater distance that may be required, to prevent the fire from escaping.

2.4.6 Fire must be attended until the initial flame height has reduced. Ensure fire is regularly monitored after lighting to make sure there are no escapes of fire into any surrounding vegetation.

2.4.7 On completion of the pile burn, ensure the fire is completely extinguished by turning over any coals or remnants and applying large amounts of water to completely extinguish. Continue to turn over and apply water until all coals, remnants and the entire burn area is completely cold to touch and no longer emits smoke or any steam. Check the pile at least once each day until it is fully extinguished.

2.4.8 If multiple piles are to be burnt consider burning only one at a time to ensure that you retain control of each burn.

2.4.9 Prior to igniting the pile, check the weather conditions not only for the day that you are intending to burn, but for the following few days as piles may tend to smoulder for a considerable period of time. If the weather conditions are not favourable for 3-4 days out then you should postpone the burn until more favourable conditions are predicted.

2.4.10 Regularly check your burn site for the following weeks for any materials that may still be burning. This is important if you have burnt before a Total Fire Ban day. Materials can smoulder underground for a considerable amount of time.

2.4.11 If the fire becomes too large or uncontrollable you **MUST** contact emergency services immediately by calling 000

Smoke Management

To manage smoke production, do not start burning too early in the day. Between 12 noon and 12 midnight is generally recommended as fuel moisture will have decreased sufficiently by this time and will produce less smoke. Do not burn if there are large amounts of green fuels as this will also cause a smoke management problem.

Wind direction is a contributing factor to smoke causing adverse effects on sensitive sites, such as hospitals, schools, vineyards etc. Note whether or not there are any sensitive sites nearby and ensure the wind direction is such that it will not cause smoke to impact on them.



You must place approved "SMOKE HAZARD" signs on both sides of the road if the area to be burnt is adjacent to a regularly used road and smoke is likely to blow over the road, impairing the vision and safety of drivers. These signs should be placed on the shoulder of the road so they can be seen by drivers before they encounter smoke.

The signs may be temporary fixed to a rigid guide post but should not be fixed to other road signs. If stands are used they need to be capable of remaining upright and in place under windy conditions. To prevent the need for signing, make sure the wind direction directs smoke away from any roads.

3 REVIEW

This code will be released for a 12 month trial period and will be reviewed every 2 years after the trial period has ended.

South Australian Country Fire Service

VEGETATION PILE BURNING

CODE OF PRACTICE

SA COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE STATE HEADQUARTERS

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REGIONAL OFFICES

REGION 1

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REGION 2

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Murraylands and Riverland

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REGION 4

**Flinders Ranges, Mid North and Pastoral
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