

Smoke management from planned burns

The management of vegetation fuels is critical for public safety, economic and ecological reasons. However, it is important that smoke emissions are managed in a manner that reduces potential impacts on public health and amenity. Guidelines to provide for the better management of smoke emissions from planned burns have been developed.

Why are planned burns carried out?

- Planned burns are conducted by land managers during autumn for a number of reasons:
 1. 'Fuel management burns' are undertaken to reduce the level or distribution of fuels in forests and grasslands so that any wild-fires that occur within treated areas are less intense and are more likely to be brought under control without threat to property and lives
 2. 'Residue burns' are undertaken to remove residues from agricultural operations including plantations
 3. 'Regeneration burns' are undertaken to reduce residues and prepare seedbeds for the regeneration of eucalypt forests following harvesting operations.
 4. 'Ecological management burns' are undertaken to maintain natural vegetation patterns and habitats.
- Fire is a natural and unavoidable feature of the Australian landscape. Land and fire management practices must be conducted in a manner that reduces the risks to lives, property and natural values, including biodiversity and water.
- As well as threats to safety, assets and other values from fire, the public is also concerned about the potential health effects of exposure to high levels of smoke, from both wildfires and planned burns.
- It is not possible on public safety, economic and ecological grounds to cease the use of planned burns. However, it is appropriate and necessary for planned burns to be conducted in a manner that minimises the risk of smoke concentration in populated areas.

- Alternatives to planned burns are limited. High technology incinerators such as air curtain burners may be appropriate in urban or industrial situations. However, cost and logistics preclude the use of such devices in agricultural and forestry situations, with at least a ten-fold increase in the costs of fuel management.
- Markets for residues to be used for bioenergy or heating have not yet developed in Tasmania to enable removal of this material from the field.

Who is responsible for managing smoke from planned burns?

- The National Environment Protection Measure (NEPM) for Ambient Air Quality has been issued by the National Environment Protection Council. The NEPM sets standards and goals for air quality. The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is responsible for implementation of the NEPM in Tasmania including monitoring of air quality.
- Burns conducted for any purpose during the fire permit period must have a fire permit. A fire permit relates only to safety issues. Burns conducted during the fire permit period in accordance with the permit are exempt from the provisions of the *Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 2007*.
- Hazard reduction burns and agricultural residue burns are currently not subject to regulation outside of the fire permit period.
- The management of burns conducted as part of a forest harvesting or regeneration operation are subject to prescriptions in a certified forest practices plan.

What are the smoke management guidelines?

- The FPA and the EPA are working with representatives of the various land management agencies to reduce the risk of smoke pollution within populated centres through improvements to the planning and conduct of burns.
- Smoke Management Guidelines were introduced on a trial basis in 2008. The outcomes are reviewed by the Coordinated Smoke Management System (CSMS) Working Group after each fire season and guidelines updated as necessary.
- The guidelines provide for a coordinated smoke management strategy to plan, monitor and improve smoke management.
 - 1: Plan:
Planned burns are coordinated to minimise the risk of high concentrations of smoke within individual air sheds, using data and models developed by the Bureau of Meteorology. This means that restrictions are imposed as required to ban or limit the number of burns on days when weather forecasts predict poor smoke dispersal.
 - 2: Monitor:
The smoke management strategy is supported by an extended network of smoke monitoring stations which the EPA uses to monitor smoke dispersal.
 - 3: Improve:
Personnel involved in the planning and conduct of burns undergo training. The FPA, EPA, TFS, forest industry and local government meet annually to review the previous fire season and discuss plans for the coming season.
- A copy of the smoke management guidelines, called the Forest Industry Standard for Prescribed Burning 2009, can be downloaded from www.fpa.tas.gov.au. Any improvement in guidelines since then have been noted on a special CSMS website used by burners.

How will the smoke management guidelines be implemented?

- The guidelines and strategy are applied to burns conducted as part of a forest harvesting or regeneration operation and to hazard reduction and ecological management burns conducted by the forestry industry, Hobart and Launceston City

Councils, the Parks and Wildlife Service and Tasmania Fire Service. On a daily basis users of the Coordinated Smoke Management System enter information on their planned burns into the special website, which then provides a fuel weight allocation to each burner in each air shed, in relation to local weather forecasts. The outcomes are monitored and the results are used to further refine the guidelines and the strategy.

- The EPA and FPA encourage the application of the guidelines to all other burns with a view to encouraging the future participation of other planned burners in the coordination mechanism.
- The FPA is primarily responsible for regulating the planning and conduct of burning activities through prescriptions in certified forest practices plans. However, some burning may be conducted outside the period covered by a forest practices plan. The EPA will continue to be responsible for monitoring smoke emissions and reporting against the NEPM standards. Potential breaches of forest practices plans or legislation will be investigated and serious breaches will be subject to action under the relevant legislation.

What can I do if I have an enquiry or a complaint about smoke management?

- Complaints or information about smoke should be directed where possible to the land manager responsible for the burn.
- Advice about the potential health impacts of smoke exposure can be obtained from the Department of Health and Human Services (telephone 6222 7724).
- Complaints relating to smoke nuisance should be lodged with the EPA (telephone 6233 6518).
- Information about planned burns is available from the Tasmania Fires Service website [Whats Burning Now?](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au) This webpage and map displays all planned burns being conducted for the current burning season, where information has been provided to the Tasmania Fire Service (fire.tas.gov.au).
- Sustainable Timber Tasmania provides information on their [planned-burns](http://sttas.com.au) web site (sttas.com.au).
- Information about planned burns conducted by the Parks and Wildlife Service is available from [their website](http://parks.tas.gov.au), which is also updated daily during the burning season (parks.tas.gov.au).

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