



Stuart Ayres MP
Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Minister for Sport and Recreation
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MEDIA RELEASE

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PREPARATION VITAL FOR CHALLENGING BUSHFIRE SEASON

Police and Emergency Services Minister Stuart Ayres and NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons are urging residents in bushfire prone areas to prepare themselves and their homes for the threat of bushfire.

The statutory Bush Fire Danger Period (BFDP) will commence tomorrow, Wednesday 1 October 2014. More than one-third of the State has already commenced its danger period due to prevailing dry conditions.

The Bureau of Meteorology advises that a large area of north-eastern NSW has only received 60 per cent or less of average rainfall since 1 January 2014, despite heavy rainfall across the State in recent weeks.

Minister Ayres said the Bureau's outlook through to December indicates drier than average conditions across eastern and northern NSW and warmer than normal temperatures for the entire State.

"With hot and dry conditions expected to prevail, along with a chance of those conditions being intensified by an El Nino event, it is important that everyone understands the bushfire risk and prepares for it," Mr Ayres said.

"We know all too well the devastating impact that bushfires had on the Blue Mountains, Port Stephens and the Southern Highlands communities last October, when more than 200 homes were destroyed.

"At the beginning of August, in winter, firefighters were battling more than 100 blazes simultaneously, including more than 20 bushfires around Clarence Valley and Kempsey which destroyed five homes.

The NSW RFS and the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre have today released new research which shows many of those affected by last year's bushfires were not fully prepared or understood the risk.

Commissioner Fitzsimmons said the research undertaken in the Blue Mountains, Port Stephens and Southern Highlands after the October 2013 fires revealed one in four people (27 per cent) had no plan for what to do during a bushfire.

Of the 73 per cent who had some form of plan, fewer than one in 10 people had formalised it by writing down what they would do and where they would go.

“While firefighters and emergency agencies will do everything they can to keep the community safe, protection is a shared responsibility and the community needs to do its part,” Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

“Know what you need to do to prepare yourself, your family and your home before a bushfire and know what each member of your family will do if a fire threatens.

“I urge everyone living in bushfire prone areas to download a free Bush Fire Survival Plan from www.rfs.nsw.gov.au and have a conversation with the family. There are only two pages to fill in and those two pages could save the lives of you and your loved ones.”

Fire & Rescue NSW Commissioner Greg Mullins said it is also important for people who do not live close to bushland to make preparations.

“Embers from bushfires can travel great distances, across several streets or even up to 30 kilometres in the worst of weather conditions and when they land they can start new fires,” Commissioner Mullins said.

“That is why it is essential that you have a Bush Fire Survival Plan and prepare your property, even if you don’t live right next to the bushland.

“This means clearing gutters of leaves, maintaining gardens and checking that your garden hoses can reach all corners of your property.”

Anyone wanting to conduct a hazard reduction burn during the BFDP must contact their local NSW RFS Fire Control Centre or local fire station and apply for a free permit.

Heavy penalties, including fines up to \$2200, apply for landholders who do not follow BFDP restrictions and rules.

Discarding a lit cigarette now carries an increased fine of \$660, which doubles to \$1320 during a Total Fire Ban.

The statutory BFDP for NSW ends on Tuesday 31 March, 2015.

Further BFDP information is available at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/fire-information/BFDP.

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