



Escaped fires prompt warning from NSW RFS

27 August 2013

More than three hundred and fifty escaped hazard reductions this month alone has prompted the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) to issue a stern reminder to landholders of their responsibilities when lighting fires.

NSW RFS Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers said that landholders have a responsibility to carefully consider conditions before lighting any burns.

“There are many responsible landowners in NSW who have conducted hazard reductions safely and we thank them for their efforts.

“However, alongside these safe hazard reductions, we also have had to deal with far too many escaped hazard reductions this year. Volunteer firefighters have already spent many hours away from their families, friends and jobs this month attempting to control 351 escaped hazard reductions.

“In some instances, these preventable fires have not only damaged the property of landholders, but also the property of their neighbours.

“If people are planning to burn on their own property they must do it safely. They also must notify their neighbours and the NSW RFS at least 24 hours before any planned burns and cannot leave fires unattended.

“Escaped hazard reductions will be investigated, and where appropriate, action taken against landowners.

“We have already deployed five Fire Investigators to the Mid-North Coast to assist in determining the cause and origin of several fires and determine what action should be taken, and we will not hesitate to deploy others as needed.

“Action can include substantial fines and, in the most serious cases, prosecution. Escaped fires attract a penalty of up to \$110,000 and/or five years jail and failure to notify authorities of fires can result in a \$5,500 fine and/or twelve months jail,” Deputy Commissioner Rogers said.

Recent escaped hazard reductions include:

- Upper Colo (Hawkesbury) – Rubbish pile burn that got out of control, destroying a home. Fire took ten trucks, 30 firefighters & a helicopter to extinguish.
- Shoalhaven – Spread into surrounding bushland, required 13 fire trucks, 37 volunteers and more than five hours work to extinguish.
- Clarence Valley – two fires that threatened homes, taking firefighters several days to extinguish.

“Burns can still be conducted after the start of the official Bush Fire Danger Period with a free permit from the local RFS, so property owners should not rush to complete them now if the conditions are not safe.

NSW RFS brigades are happy to help people plan and conduct safe hazard reduction burns to help ensure the safety of both landowners’ property and the broader community. Members can also provide advice on fire permits, hazard reduction certificates, environmental approvals and weather forecasts,” Deputy Commissioner Rogers said.

For more information contact the State Duty Media Officer on 9898 1855.