

How the rural fire system works

Fires in rural areas are the responsibility of the person(s) who light them. Fire suppression of uncontrolled fires in rural areas however is the responsibility of the Rural Fire Authority. This is different from urban areas where the New Zealand Fire Service is the urban fire authority and is responsible for the fire suppression.

Rural Fire Authorities are primarily concerned with the control of vegetation fires. They're also responsible for fire prevention activities and as such monitor the daily fire danger, declare fire seasons and issue fire permits.

Rural Fire Authorities are:

- The **Department of Conservation** for state areas
- **NZ Defence Force** for most of its own lands
- **Rural Fire District Committee** for specially Gazetted areas
- **Territorial Authorities** for all areas that fall outside the above.

If in doubt ring your:

Local Council or the **Department of Conservation**.

The work of these Rural Fire Authorities is co-ordinated by the National Rural Fire Authority.

The National Rural Fire Authority co-ordinates rural fire control nationally, and promotes training, research and co-operation between the Rural Fire Authorities.

The authority also sets national standards; monitors fire danger and administers the Rural Fire Fighting Fund.

ring 111

immediately if you see a fire

Sound Fire Prevention Actions

- **Maintain** machinery and equipment.
- **Dispose** of cigarette butts carefully.
- **Find out** about fire bans before going into a rural area.
- **Ensure** access to water if lighting a fire.
- **Don't** leave your campfire.
- **Ensure** your campfire is extinguished completely.
- **Don't** light a fire if in doubt.



**NATIONAL RURAL
FIRE
AUTHORITY**
Te mana ahi manaha o te motu

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FIRES

in rural areas



Your **responsibility** for fires in rural areas is quite different from urban areas.

You could be personally liable for the costs associated with a fire on rural land if you are proved responsible for causing it.

The costs of fighting fires in rural areas passed on to the **individuals responsible** have run from **\$10,000** to more than **\$250,000**.

This pamphlet provides information to rural dwellers and anyone using rural land, such as trampers, hunters, fishers and mountain bikers, to advise you about how the system works, the precautions you must take and when you are liable.

The National Rural Fire Authority has also produced a pamphlet for landowners called a Farmer's Practical Guide to Rural Fire.

Fire **seasons** and **fire permits**

There are three fire seasons you should be aware of:



Open fire season

– means no fire permit is needed to light a fire in the open air



Restricted fire season

– means a fire permit from the relevant rural fire authority is required to light a fire in the open air



Prohibited fire season

– means a total fire ban and lighting of fires is not permitted in the open air

You should know what fire season is operating if you are travelling or visiting a rural area. Changes to fire seasons are notified by radio announcements or newspaper advertisements or information is available directly from the relevant rural fire authority.

When Restricted or Prohibited fire seasons are in place, the relevant Rural Fire Authority may also erect signs within the affected area notifying you of this requirement.

When do I need a fire permit?

You'll need a fire permit during a Restricted fire season. Check with the local Rural Fire Authority regarding what fire season is in place.

However, even if you have a permit you are still responsible for a fire that spreads and causes damage. And, failure to obtain a permit for a fire is an offence against the Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977.



Charges for fires

Under the Fire Service Act the cost of fighting a fire in an urban area by the Fire Service is mostly funded by a fire levy on building insurance, but the rules in rural areas are different.

You need to be aware that the cost of fighting vegetation fires on rural lands can be passed on to the landowner, or the person who caused the fire.

There are powers under the Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977 to recover the fire fighting costs of fires from individuals.

The National Rural Fire Authority and/or the Rural Fire Authority decide when to seek cost recovery for fire suppression costs from an individual. Each case is considered on its merits.

Some recreational groups have fire suppression insurance cover for their members in case they cause a fire. It would be worthwhile to find out whether the group that you belong to has insurance cover for this purpose, or to join a group that does provide cover.

In addition families may wish to speak with their insurance company and seek, in addition to the household insurance, coverage for the cost of fire fighting for a fire caused by a family member in a rural area.