

# VELDFIRES

# Be prepared for veldfires

Veldfires, also known as wildfires or bushfires, are a common occurrence in South Africa, particularly during the dry season, which usually runs from May to October in the northern parts of the country and from November to April in the southern parts of the country. These fires can occur naturally owing to lightning strikes, but they are often caused by human activities such as unpermitted burning, unattended campfires, discarded cigarettes, welding or grinding or malicious damage to properties and for criminal reasons.

Veldfires can have a significant impact on the environment, including the loss of habitat for wildlife, as well as erosion and soil degradation. They also pose a significant risk to human life and property, particularly in areas where homes and communities are located close to natural vegetation.

Veldfires remain a significant challenge for South Africa, particularly in the face of changing weather patterns and increasing development in fire-prone areas. Vigilance, preparedness and responsible behaviour are essential to mitigate the impact of veldfires on both the environment and human communities.

Veldfires can happen anytime, anywhere. Remember, veldfires are dangerous and unpredictable. Always take the necessary precautions to protect yourself and your property.



## Prepare NOW

Sign up for your community's warning system or your local fire protection association.

**Know your community's evacuation routes** and find several ways to leave the area. Drive the evacuation routes and find shelter locations. Have a plan for pets and livestock.

**Gather emergency supplies, including N95 respirator masks** that filter out particles in the air you breathe. Be mindful of each person's specific needs, including medication. Don't forget the needs of pets.

**Keep important documents** in a fireproof safe. Create password-protected digital copies.

**Use fire-resistant materials to build,** renovate or make repairs.

**Find an outdoor water source with a hose** that can reach any area of your property.

**Create a fire-resistant zone** that is free of leaves, debris or flammable materials for at least 10 meters from your home.

**Make fire breaks on the border of your property:** The fire break must be free of combustible material. Your local fire protection association and your municipality's by-laws will indicate the size of the fire break. This is in accordance with Act 101 of 1998, the National Veld and Forest Fire Act.

**Maintain your property:** Keep your property well-maintained by trimming trees and shrubs, clearing dead leaves and debris and ensuring that your gutters are clean.

**A reserve water supply is necessary,** especially during loadshedding. Water from a river can be used to extinguish a veldfire near your house, or the river can be a refill point.

**Ensure that your insurance is in place.**

**Firefighting equipment and personnel:** Have your firefighting equipment ready, for example knapsacks, fire beaters, bakkie fire units, etc.

**Thatched roof:** Keep trees and leaves trimmed and clean on and around a thatched roof.

**Fire Danger Index:** Know what the FDI is for the day, the fire behaviour and the measures that must be in place for extinguishing veldfires.

**Personal protection equipment:** Have your PPE ready in case you must assist with fighting a veldfire.

## Survive DURING

**Your safety first.** Remember safety is always the top priority during a veldfire. Stay calm and take appropriate precautions.

**Every owner must make a** reasonable effort to try to stop the fire moving to the neighbours.

**Report the veldfire** as soon as possible to the emergency services, fire protection association and neighbours.

**Communication:** Always know what the fire is doing. This can be done through your local two-way radio system or other social media groups.

**Animals:** Ensure that your animals are out of harm's way.

**Stay in the black:** When busy extinguishing the fire, always stay in the black to be safe.

**If trapped:** Use your communication system to notify what is happening and give your location. If possible, have a light handy to make it easier for people to find you.

**Use an N95 mask** to keep particles out of the air you breathe.

**Stay hydrated:** Drink plenty of water or isotonic cold drinks to stay hydrated and help your body cope with the heat.

## Be safe AFTER

**Do mop-up:** Extinguish any embers on the fire line by walking the fire line to ensure that the fire will not start burning again. Kick all animal dung back into the black area.

Be careful of hot ash, charred trees, smouldering debris and live embers. The ground may contain heat pockets that can burn you or spark another fire.

**Document property damage with photographs.** Conduct an inventory and contact your insurance company for assistance.

**Plan for the future:** Consider taking steps to prevent future veldfires such as creating a defensible space around structures, clearing away dead vegetation and using fire-resistant building materials.

Remember, recovering from a veldfire can take time, so be patient and take things one step at a time.

