



DEPARTMENT: AGRICULTURE



Fighting fire

Fire can cause serious damage on a farm. It can destroy crops and grazing for animals.

People or animals can get injured or may even die in the fire.

Only one match can destroy thousands of trees and large areas of farmland.

- Most crop fires occur before or soon after harvesting. At this time the crops are usually ripe and dry and burn easily. When crops have lost their green colour, leaves wilt and the ears droop, fires can be expected.
- If a fire breaks out in a barn, remove the unburnt material as quickly as possible to prevent the fire from spreading.
- When the wind is blowing, especially in August, fires can start and spread very easily.



How to prevent fires

- Children should not play with matches.
- Do not throw burning matches or cigarettes into dry grass, leaves, bushes or barns.
- Do not throw cigarette stubs out of a car window.
- Make sure that all fires are put out properly.
- Use sand to put out a fire.
- Do not make open fires in the veld.
- Never light fires in the open during windy weather.
- Never leave a fire without putting it out or asking someone to keep an eye.



If you see a fire



- If you see a veld fire, report it immediately to your neighbours and the local fire warden. Tell them exactly where the fire is.
- Leave someone at home to give people information about the fire. If you have a radio or telephone, the lines must be kept open so that new information can be passed on as soon as it is received.
- Go back immediately to the spot where you saw the fire. Take also basic equipment to fight the fire with.

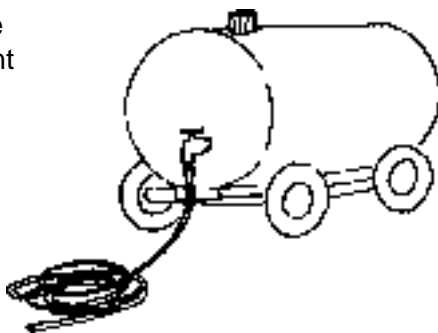
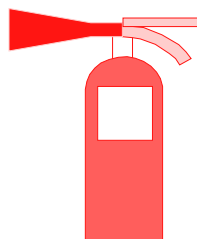


- If you are not the landowner, inform him or her about the exact position of the fire.
- When you arrive at the fire, organise the firefighters as soon as possible. If you have a radio keep the person on standby at home updated on the situation so that the fire warden and neighbours can be alerted.
- If possible, take a notebook with you and write down the details of the fire.
- Remove all farm animals and equipment to a safe place.
- Throw water onto the fire as soon as possible.



Tools (equipment) you can use to put out a fire

- **Hoses**
- **Fire extinguishers**—water or dry-powder type
- Make **fire swatters** from old beltings (strips of rubber) or wet sacks. Beating the fire with the beltings or wet sacks takes away the air (oxygen) which the fire needs to burn. If there is not enough air, the fire will smother and die slowly.
- Use **rucksack pumps** to wet the plants and grass near and in front of the fire. Rucksack pumps are also useful when checking for flare-ups after the fire has been put out.
- Use **water containers** and a **waterpump** that can supply enough water.





- **Shovels, rakes and spades** can be used to make a firebreak quickly. A counter fire can be made from this break. A break is a clean strip of land, almost like a road.
- Use shovels and rakes to put out the fire with **sand** and **soil**. Use them also to remove dry grass and twigs which can burn easily.

- Use **hand slashers** to cut unburnt grass and plants before an oncoming fire.
- Use **fire swatters** (leafy branches or sacks fitted to the end of wooden sticks).

Food and water

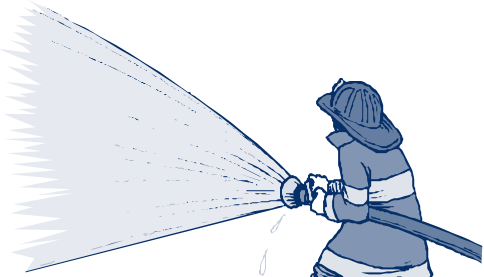
Arrange for food and drinking water to be taken to the scene of the fire for the firefighters. It is a good idea to keep a supply of food, such as dry biscuits, tinned food (bullybeef, beans in tomato sauce, tuna, tomatoes and onions), maize-meal and instant cold drinks ready in case of emergency.

Remember that the firefighters can get very tired.



Fighting the fire

- Do not allow too many people in the area.
- The firefighters should work short shifts (periods). Those in front should be replaced at short intervals.
- Approach the fire from one or both sides and try to narrow the front of the fire.



- If there is a fire-belt (break) or a natural barrier such as a river, try to narrow the fire against the barrier.

- Set up firefighters at strategic places to put out sparks carried by the wind. Strong wind can carry sparks as far as 1 km.



- Use waterpumps to cool down the flames and to enable the beaters to reach the fire and put out the smouldering material.
- It is important to beat inwards to the burning area so that sparks are not blown into grass and leaves that are not burning yet.

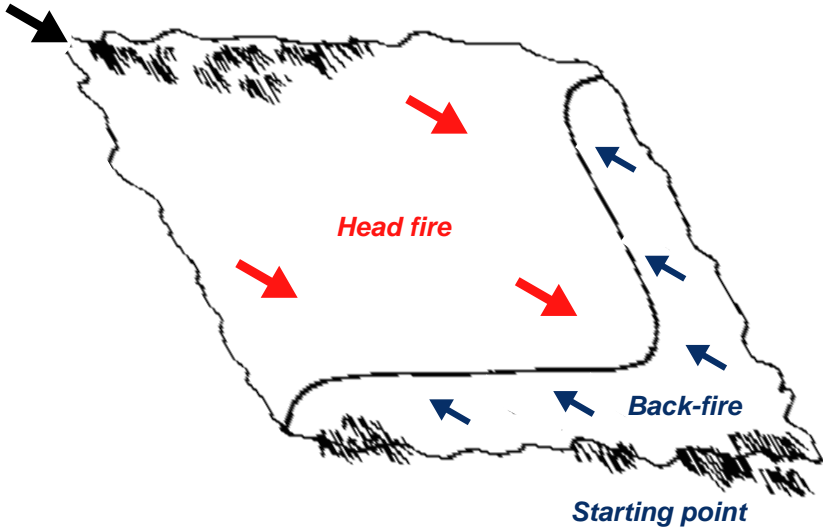
- A clean break must be raked or hoed behind the firefighters to separate the burnt area from unburnt plants. Throw the leaves and grass that you have raked or hoed into the burnt area.



- Monitor the wind direction at all times.
- Carry a whistle. This may help you to give the firefighters basic signals.



Wind direction



Back-burning

If the wind is very strong and it is impossible to stop the fire by direct beating, back-burning may be considered as a last resort. Back-burning can be very dangerous. A back-burn is a new fire from the opposite direction to meet the fire that is already burning.

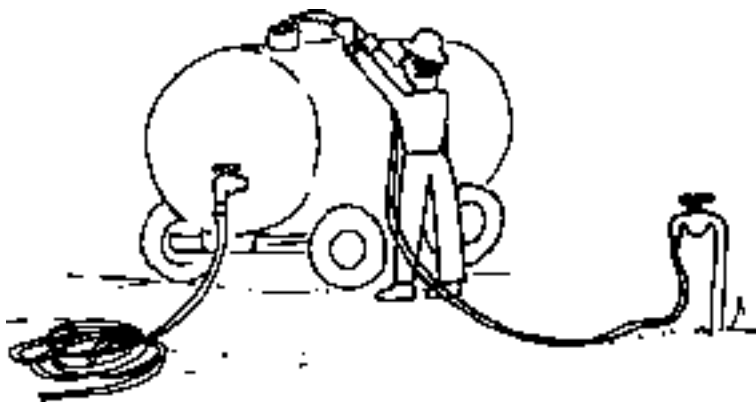
- It is very important to ensure that no-one comes between the fire and the back-burn.
- Back-burn from the road, fire-belt or natural barrier well ahead of the fire.
- Burn only a very narrow strip at a time and slowly widen the strip.
- Do not let the back-burn fire flare up and throw sparks—rather dampen the grass and leaves with water, or put out the fire if it seems too dangerous, before continuing.



When the fire has been put out

Once the fire is put out, the following should be done:

- Make sure that the firefighters have not been injured
- Patrol the area for at least 3 hours to check for flare-ups
- Return equipment to the correct place
- Refill water containers such as tankers
- Repair damaged equipment.



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