

Time for caution to prevent fires

CENTRAL Otago and Queenstown Lakes District Councils are implementing prohibited fire seasons throughout their districts.

The bans came into force in Central Otago on December 3 and will be implemented by the QLDC on December 10. They include all Department of Conservation and forest lands in those districts.

Vegetation in other areas in Otago and Southland is steadily drying, so with a continuation of present weather conditions, it will not be too long before more authorities implement total fire bans too.

A prohibited fire season means that no fires can be lit in the open air unless authorised by a special fire permit issued by a rural fire authority. Usually permits are only issued for removal of disease and for health reasons.

Conditions at present mean fires will start more easily and spread more rapidly than normal, so it is even more important to prevent them.

There has been ample opportunity to plan for and undertake various clean-up burning activities around properties during the past two to three months. Where burning has not been achieved, it may well be prudent to leave it until well into autumn or when conditions are more favourable.

Using mowers in dry conditions is an activity that increases the chance of starting fires. I am aware of two fires in the past few days that were caused by mowers striking stones and creating sparks while topping paddocks.

FIRE BREAK

Advice from Mike Grant
Southern Rural Fire Authority
Principal Rural Fire Officer



Topping is extremely important to maintain pasture quality, but consideration should be given to the time of day when working with mowers.

There is less chance of starting a fire in the early morning or late evening when it is cooler and there is more moisture in the dead material.

Similarly vehicles with hot exhausts should not be driven into dry long grass and welding/grinding operations should not be carried out in dry grassed areas. Check the area for any fires that may have started when you have finished doing that sort of work.

Barbecues are a favourite pastime for us Kiwis, particularly in the summer months. Rural fire authorities prefer gas barbecues, as they are safer and less likely to cause fires when maintained properly.

When using gas barbecues always check the gas connections have a good seal and are not leaking before lighting. Have a 3m clearance of combustible material around the barbecue, and some water or an extinguisher handy and stay in attendance. When finished, check the gas supply and appliance are turned off.



Taste of summer: When cranking up the barbecue this summer, be aware that only gas barbecues can be used if there is a fire ban in your area. PHOTO: SRL FILES

10 summer fire prevention tips

- 1** Know about fire bans in your area and take note of Fire Danger road signs.
- 2** Establish a clear safety zone around your home — a 10m-wide area clear of vegetation, firewood and rubbish.
- 3** Ensure all rubbish is removed regularly from your home or campsite and do not burn outside.
- 4** Place burnt matches, cigarette butts and ash in fireproof metal containers.
- 5** To be ready to react to a fire, have a garden hose that can reach all parts of your property connected to a tap throughout summer.
- 6** Test cords and plugs on power tools and lawnmowers. An electrician will be able to tell you if cords and plugs are safe.
- 7** Supervise barbecues, hangis, umus and campfires and site them away from things likely to catch fire. Fire bans may restrict barbecues to gas-fired only.
- 8** Arson is a dangerous crime. If you see children or adults acting suspiciously near vegetation, call the police.
- 9** Fuels and flammable liquids should be stored in approved containers and handled with care.
- 10** Extinguish outdoor fires completely. Stir ashes and cool hot spots.