

Forecast for days after a burn-off key to planning

PLANNING CRUCIAL

FIRSTLY, I want to reinforce a key message I have regularly communicated in previous columns — that thorough planning is absolutely critical and essential to achieve a safe burn-off.

Recent escaped fires highlight that less-than-adequate preparation has been undertaken in several cases.

Many inland areas have not received average rainfall during the year and are particularly dry.

In addition, winter snow and frost lying on the vegetation for weeks or months has left vegetation extremely dry, so people undertaking prescribed burns need to be extra vigilant.

Prescribed burning is an element of farm management that must be carefully managed and planned for, just like many other aspects of regular farm maintenance.

Typically, many fires escape the day or several days after the original burn when windy conditions spread live embers.

When planning your burn, make sure the weather fore-

FIRE BREAK

Advice from Mike Grant
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cast for after the proposed burn time is suitable and does not include winds that may cause a fire to escape.

If the vegetation and weather conditions are not suitable for burning, then *don't burn*.

MAINTAIN MACHINERY
SECONDLY, it is timely to revisit machinery maintenance requirements.

About this time every year there is an increase in the number of machinery and tractor fires throughout Southland and Otago.

There are many causes of fires including electrical faults, fuel leaks, exhaust faults and escaped emissions, heat build-up in mechanical parts and birds nesting in the motor compartment.

By far the major concern for machine owners and operators at this time of year is

birds nesting in machines.

Birds seek shelter and warmth and where better than a machine that has been running and is nice and warm.

Fires, no matter how small, impact on your livelihood, whether that is farming, forestry or contracting.

In the worst-case scenario, your machine is destroyed and a replacement may not be immediately available.

Even worse would be if the machine was parked in a shed with other valuable assets.

This scenario occurs regularly and is devastating for all concerned.

There is no substitute for routine daily maintenance to reduce the chance of fires starting in the first place.

This should be undertaken before starting the machine in the morning and after breaks, and should include the following:

Removing debris (twigs, leaves, grass, bark, straw/nests, oil, etc) from around motors, turbo units, belly pans and exhaust systems. Note that birds will nest in most obscure places which can be

difficult to get to, e.g. behind the firewall.

Repair oil and fuel leaks.
 Depending on the type of work being undertaken, wash down machinery regularly to remove debris.

Suitable fire extinguishers should be on the machine. Consider two to three extinguishers as in most cases one alone is insufficient and fires would be extinguished with a second extinguisher.

Keep extinguishers tested and in working order.

When operating your machine, do not overload it as this can cause bearings, brakes, hydraulic units and other load-bearing parts to overheat.

Consider installing a self-activating fire extinguisher system.

If the machine is not turbo-charged it should be fitted with a spark arrestor.

Good "housekeeping" will prevent loss of machinery, stop your insurance premium going up and save your livelihood.