

Rural Fire

Overview

Rural fire within the Western Bay of Plenty is managed by the Western Bay Moana Rural Fire Authority, which provides services for Western Bay of Plenty District Council, rural areas of Tauranga City Council, Department of Conservation, and Department of Internal Affairs (*in respect of Mayor and Motiti Islands*).

Services include fire planning, permit issue, rural fire management and control, and a variety of legislative requirements established by the Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977.

Questions.

How are fire seasons set and notified?

The Fire Authority operates three '**Fire Seasons**':

- **'Open'** No permits are required for open-air fires.
- **'Restricted'** Fires are allowed, provided they meet certain criteria. A fire permit is required for all open air fires, with the exception of gas-powered barbecues.
- **'Prohibited'** A total ban applies to *all* open-air fires. An exemption may be made and a 'Special Permit' issued for emergency purposes

A '**Restricted Fire Season**' is imposed on the 1st October and remains in force until 30th April in the following year. A permit to burn is required during this period. A '**Prohibited Fire Season**' may be imposed at any time, dependant on prevailing weather conditions and degree of fire risk.

Fire Season status is notified by public notice in local newspapers. Total fire bans are notified by all available means, including road-side signs.

How do I obtain a fire permit?

If you are a Western Bay of Plenty District resident, contact Council on (07) 571 8008 during normal office hours (*After-hours applications are not accepted*). Details will be taken and your application passed to the Fire Authority for action. You should allow a minimum of two working days for processing and issue. If a Rural Fire Officer is required to inspect the proposed burn site, allow additional time.

If you are a Tauranga City rural resident you can apply to Tauranga City Council on (07) 577 7000 during normal office hours. (*After-hours applications are not accepted*). Your application will be actioned as above.

No permit application will be treated as urgent. A general fire permit is valid for a period of 14 days from the date of issue; this allows adequate time for you to plan your fire. If the burn is not carried out within that time, the permit can be renewed.

If you need to renew the fire permit, call the number shown above. All original conditions will continue to apply.

You should have the fire permit in your possession before lighting the fire, and you must make it available to any Rural Fire Officer, NZ Fire Service or Police officer who requires to see it.

What conditions are imposed?

Your Fire Permit contains a range of conditions which will assist you in conducting a safe burn. The main conditions imposed by the Rural Fire Authority are:

- No fire shall be left unattended while burning.
- No fire shall be lit or left burning between the hours of sunset and sunrise unless specific approval to do so has been given. Such approval may be dependant on prior inspection by a Rural Fire Officer.
- Standing scrub is not to be lit unless the site has been inspected by a Rural Fire Officer and specific approval given.
- No fire shall be lit within 5 metres of any part of a building, tree, hedge, fence, or other combustible material.
- No fire shall be larger than 5 x 5 metres without specific approval from the Principal Rural Fire Officer.
- Water and/or tools must be available on site to contain the fire. If you are burning household rubbish or other material in the back yard, the minimum requirement is a garden hose connected to the water supply.
- You must not burn green vegetation, tyres, plastics, foam products, waste oil etc. These create smoke and odour nuisances.

Statutory conditions apply to fires in the open air, and these are also shown on the permit.

Under certain circumstances, you may be required to advise the Rural Fire Authority before actually lighting the fire. This allows notification to be made to the Fire Service '111' system, and reduces the number of un-necessary call-outs of Fire Service and Rural Fire Authority resources. Any such requirement will be printed on the fire permit at the time of issue. This condition is generally imposed when a proposed fire will be clearly visible to the public and/or is likely to cause alarm due to its location.

Dependant on your proximity to commercial forest lands, you may also be required to notify a neighbouring Rural Fire Authority before lighting the fire. That requirement will be printed on the fire permit at the time of issue, and a copy of the permit forwarded to the applicable neighbouring Rural Fire Authority.

If you are unsure as to how these conditions apply, you can contact a Rural Fire Officer through Western Bay of Plenty District Council, on (07) 571 8008. General advice on conducting a safe burn can be obtained the same way.

Holding a valid fire permit does not in any way diminish your responsibility to manage your fire safely and properly. If you light it, you are responsible for it, and for any consequences which may arise from it.

Are there any costs involved in getting a Fire Permit?

There is no charge for the issue of a fire permit, for a pre-burn inspection by a Rural Fire Officer, or the provision of advice on safe burning practises.

Who pays for controlling rural fires?

If you light a fire, whether permitted or un-permitted, and it escapes, you can be held liable for the full costs of suppressing that fire. You can also be held liable for any damage caused to another person's property. Recent fires within the Western Bay of Plenty have cost up to \$30,000 to suppress.

The NZ Fire Service provides initial response services to the Fire Authority. Under an operational agreement, the first hour of response at a vegetation fire is provided at no cost; attendance for subsequent time at a fire is charged to the Rural Fire Authority, with those charges being passed, in turn, to the person responsible for the fire. Fire Service costs may include fire-fighter time, time and mileage for fire appliances, and the use of pumps, hose-lines, and other equipment. Rural Fire Authority costs may include the operational costs of tankers and helicopters for water delivery, Rural Fire Officer time and mileage, and the costs of any other equipment required to suppress and control the fire.

Note that the above charges apply only to vegetation fires. Response services for structural fires are not charged.

Taken in total, suppression of out-of-control fires can be a very expensive exercise. If you are a rural resident contemplating the use of fire for land management purposes, you are encouraged to discuss forest and rural fire cover with your insurers beforehand.

If you create a smoke nuisance to your neighbour or to any other person through burning green vegetation, tyres, plastics, foam products, waste oil etc, you can be subject to a \$300 instant fine. You can also be prosecuted for offences against the Forest and Rural Fires Act.

How do I report a fire in the rural area?

As with any other fire, you should dial '111' and ask the operator for 'Fire Service'. Give all the detail you can, including street or road number, and the best means of access. The nearest available fire appliance will be despatched, and the Rural Fire Authority will be notified of the fire.