

Forest Fire Risk Warning



Condition Yellow – Moderate Hazard Alert

Issue date:

Given recent dry weather patterns, and the impacts of this weather on flammability of available fine fuels, DAFM/Forest Service advises that a moderate wildfire hazard (Condition Yellow) is deemed to exist in all areas where hazardous fuels are available in proximity to woodland other assets.

This condition will remain the minimum default status until the end of the main peak fire season in June unless otherwise upgraded by Forest Service/DAFM. Forest owners and managers should be aware of the inherent high fire risk during this period.

All forest owners and managers are advised to check and update fire plans for forest holdings, and other relevant contingencies such as insurance, helicopter contracts etc. in the event of fire.

Following the recent storms, forest owners and managers should check access conditions to plantations where forest roads and other access routes may be blocked by fallen trees and debris. Where obstructions cannot be reasonably cleared, fire plan maps should be updated showing alternative safe access routes.

Forest owners, farmers, rural dwellers and holiday makers are asked to be vigilant, to report any suspicious activity to the Gardai and to report any uncontrolled or unattended fires immediately to the Fire and Emergency Services.

The Department also recommends that forest owners, managers and investors should consider the fire mitigation measures that they can put in place to help prevent loss or damage to forest resources through fire. Examples of such measures are:

- 1. Risk assessment:** Assess your property with regard to fire risk and mitigation factors. Is there a risk of fire or presence of hazardous fuel vegetation on neighbouring lands? Is there a history of land burning in the vicinity of your investment? Are access routes adequate, accessible and clear of obstructions?
- 2. Plan Ahead:** Fire Plans should be developed for all plantations, including a map showing access routes and assembly points for fire fighting personnel and equipment and potential sources of

water. The plan should also include contact details for the emergency services, local private and Coillte foresters, neighbouring landowners and forest owners in order to summon help should the need arise. Have fire-fighting tools such as beaters and knapsack sprayers to hand and ready to use. If you do not live in reasonable proximity to your woodland a local caretaker or forest neighbour should be employed and should also have a copy of the fire plan with your and all the above contact numbers.

3. **Access:** Do you have good clear access to your plantation? Clear tracks and roads if necessary and ensure forest entrances and access routes are not blocked by parked vehicles or other obstacles, especially where visitors or recreational users may be present. Suitable signage to this effect should be displayed on gates or barriers.

4. **Fire Breaks:** If a fire risk is deemed to exist on adjacent lands are there suitable vegetation free firebreaks in place? 6 metre wide fire breaks, scraped back to mineral soil are generally recommended but remember that effective firebreaks should be at least 2.5 times the expected flame length from burning vegetation. Taller flammable vegetation such as Gorse should be cut, flailed or crushed flat to reduce likely flame length. Brushing the lower branches of edge trees may greatly reduce the risk of fire transmission to the canopy from burning surface vegetation. Fire breaks can be further reinforced using protective burning techniques, but these techniques should only be attempted by trained and experienced operators.

5. **Insurance:** Forest crops should be insured against losses by fire, particularly as there is no longer a grant scheme which covers the cost of replanting or reconstituting woodland after fire. In the event of a fire destroying a forest area, the owner would have to replant this area at his/her own cost or face repaying all past grants/premiums for this area to the Forest Service.

6. **Cooperate with neighbours:** Cooperation between neighbouring landowners is critical to successful fire prevention. Forest owners should discuss their concerns about fire with local landowners in advance of the fire season. Providing assistance to farmers wishing to carry out legal prescribed burning earlier in the season is a useful way of developing good working relationships with neighbours, as well as ensuring that operations are conducted safely. Forest owners should cooperate with fire planning and share the burden of fire patrols. DAFM's prescribed burning guidelines are available at <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/landandforestfires/CofPPrescribedBurningFinal90212.pdf>

7. **Be Vigilant:** Forest owners should be particularly vigilant following prolonged dry spells. Less than 24 hours is sufficient to dry out dead moorland vegetation following rain, where windy conditions exist. Where fire is seen within the general proximity of any forest area the local Garda and your local private and Coillte foresters should be notified. Weather is critical to fire risk and Met Eireann operates a Fire Weather Index that will indicate fire risk in your area over a five day forecast. Remember – rated risks may understate actual risks on the ground.

See http://www.teagasc.ie/forestry/docs/met_eireann/fire_index_forecast.html for the latest index. Be particularly vigilant at Bank Holiday weekends where high risk weather is forecast. Forest owners should share the burden of vigilance with neighbouring owners and other concerned parties such as local residents groups etc.

8. **Obey the Law:** It is an offence to cut, grub, burn or otherwise destroy any vegetation growing on any land not then cultivated between 1st day of March and 31st day of August in any year. Report suspicious or illegal activity to Gardai immediately. Landowners wishing to carry out prescribed

burning during the legal period for doing so, must notify in writing all Forest owners within one mile, and the local Garda station between 7 and 35 days in advance of the burning operation. Landowners found burning illegally could face fines, imprisonment and Single Farm Payment penalties, where applicable.

9. Report Fires Immediately: If you see a fire, do not delay; report it to the Fire and Emergency Services straight away. Do not wait for somebody else to make the call. Dial **999** or **112**. Give clear details as regards location, where at all possible using a national grid reference and any other useful information such as the size of the fire, wind direction, proximity to dwellings or forestry etc. You will not be billed by the fire service or local authority for making the call. Do not attempt to tackle fires alone or without adequate training or protective equipment.

10. Report all losses. If your plantation is damaged or destroyed, report this loss as soon as possible to the Gardai and the Forest Service. Report losses to report.fires@agriculture.gov.ie. or in writing to Forest Service, Johnstown Castle Estate, Wexford.

BE PREPARED, BE VIGILANT, STAMP OUT FOREST FIRES