

Circular 4 of 2014

Forest Service Forest Fire Risk Warning System 2014

Forest Fire Risk Warnings are issued as circulars periodically during the main wildfire risk season from February through to July. These warnings provide forest owners and managers with advance warning of high risk weather conditions, and permit appropriate readiness and mitigation measures to be taken in advance of fire outbreaks.

Forest fire Risk Warnings are generally based on daily Met Eireann Fire Weather Index and European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) outputs, with additional processing and daily analysis by the Forest Service, in conjunction with other relevant agencies. Like other forms of weather warnings they are colour coded and conform to normal practice in weather based risk forecasting.

Like all forms of forecasting, wildfire risk warnings are indicative, and conditions on the ground at local level may differ significantly from those forecasted. The Department of Agriculture, Food and The Marine will not be liable for loss or damages arising from the issue or omission of Wildfire Risk Warnings.

To minimise exposure to risk from wildfire, all forest owners and managers should carry out hazard/risk assessments for their properties, and take adequate measures to protect and exclude fire from their properties during the different risk condition levels.

Increasing levels of preparation and vigilance are required as the risk levels scale from Green through to Red. Such measures may include the installation of firebreaks, or the removal of dangerous vegetation in proximity to property, and extend to the undertaking of fire patrols and positioning of fire suppression resources by property managers.

Wildfire Risk Warnings are Presented in four categories:

Condition Green – Low Fire Risk Conditions



Condition Green indicates that hazard status is favourable, and while vegetation can be ignited, there is a low rate of fire spread and wildfire risk. Condition Green is a favoured status for prescribed burning operations, especially protective burning near forestry and other property. Ideally, hazardous vegetation in proximity to assets should be removed/ treated under these conditions. Risk assessments, Fire Plans and relevant contact lists should be developed for all plantations prior to the onset of higher risk conditions.

Condition Yellow – Moderate Hazard Alert. Be Aware.



Yellow alert condition is the default condition during the main wildfire risk period from March to June. Under low risk conditions upland vegetation can be expected to burn steadily, with a moderate flame length and predictable rate of spread, however wind conditions and other factors can cause this to change. Forest managers and owners, and people concerned with farming and upland management should be aware of the inherent fire risk during this period. Fire plans should be completed and relevant contact lists, aviation support contracts etc. updated prior to this point.

BE PREPARED. BE VIGILANT. STAMP OUT FOREST FIRES

Condition Orange– High Fire Risk. Be Prepared.



Orange alert condition indicates weather and fuel conditions which have the capacity to significantly increase the risk of wildfire. Orange conditions will generally derive from extended periods of low precipitation, moderate relative humidity and low to moderate wind conditions. ‘Type B’ Spring Atlantic high pressure systems and accompanying calm conditions or light Westerly/South Westerly winds regularly give rise to these conditions, and create a steady drying environment for fine fuels such as grasses and heather, particularly where vegetation is dead following the winter months.

Orange level warnings may also derive from expected patterns of human activity that effect existing fire risk such as expected controlled burning patterns by landowners or other factors facilitating increased recreational use of high risk areas, such as bank holiday weekends, school holidays etc.

The issue of a Condition Orange warning implies that all recipients in affected areas should prepare appropriately for outbreaks of fire. Forest managers, landowners and rural residents should be satisfied that firebreaks are in good condition and that access routes and forest road networks are clear and fit for purpose. Where available, fire suppression personnel and forest managers should be notified and instructed to prepare for the likelihood of fire occurrence. Suitable maps, contact lists, fire plans, and equipment and relevant PPE should be checked and made ready.

Fire patrols may be warranted under such circumstances in known fire hotspots.

Condition Red – Extreme Fire Risk. Take action.



Under extreme Fire Risk Conditions any ignition source in hazardous fuels will give rise to rapid and unpredictable wildfire development and spread. Under these conditions, in Upland situations fire can be expected to cover extensive areas and pose extreme difficulties to suppression efforts and will give rise to major emergency scenarios.

Typically, extreme conditions derive from ‘Type A’ Northern European High Pressure Systems, where air circulates in a clockwise direction over the Northern European and Central European land masses. This circulation across the warm land causes the air to shed moisture and become very dry, which in turn dries out vegetation on the ground very rapidly, inducing high levels of combustibility. Where the edges of these systems rest over UK/Ireland this air will be accompanied by strong and often cold dry winds from the South East or North East, that will support further drying and rapid fire propagation and spread to produce high intensity fire events.

The issue of Condition Red Extreme fire risk warnings should be a comparatively rare event and implies that recipients should take immediate action to protect resources and property. Such action may involve the assembly and prepositioning of resources such as water tankers, machinery, personnel and contract aviation support. Preliminary notification of Defence Forces Aid to Civil Power requests by relevant authorities may also be warranted. Where extreme conditions are deemed to exist, even in the absence of a formal warning, forest owners/managers, other land managers and local authorities should implement fire patrols to exclude all fire activity from the landscape and enforce relevant fire protection legislation.

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