

Firefighting course for landowners

SOUTHERN CAPE NEWS - The Southern Cape and Greater Cederberg Fire Protection Association (FPA) offer courses in basic firefighter training to landowners and their staff, and participants say the courses are 'a must'.

The one-day courses are subsidised for FPA members and teach the basics of firefighting. This includes communications during a fire, how fires behave under different weather conditions, how to use firefighting equipment, which clothing to wear during firefighting and how to avoid huge damage that radiant heat can cause, among other essential information.

The training is offered in local areas, according to demand and is one among many courses that the FPAs offer members. "You can't take inexperienced people to fight a fire, because that is when you lose lives," said Bermon Verster, manager of a farm near Avontuur, who sent about 30 workers on the course recently. "This course was extremely helpful. It's a must."

"This training helps you fight fires far more effectively, as well as ensuring workers' safety," said PW Steinberg, manager of a farm in the Porterville mountains, whose staff also participated. "No landowner should go without this training."

To find out more or to register, phone Paul Gerber on 082 805 5840, Southern Cape FPA.

What are my legal responsibilities?

The National Veld and Forest Fire Act states that any landowner on whose land a fire may start, or from which it may spread, must take actions to prevent destruction from runaway wildfires. This includes preparing firebreaks, training staff to start fighting such fires and ensuring that staff have the necessary equipment and protective clothing. The FPA helps you to fulfil these obligations better by combining resources in a specific area, which reduces the costs.

If a fire starts on your property and you have not complied with the Act, you are legally responsible for any damage it causes to your neighbour's property. If you are an FPA member and have complied with the Act and FPA's rules, it will be the claimant's responsibility to prove that you were negligent, at his cost. Landowners who are not FPA members must prove their own innocence at their own cost.

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