

FIRE MANAGEMENT 2016/17 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Fire Management Notice

What is the City of Albany's Fire Management Notice?

The Fire Management Notice is a legal document that advises land owners and occupiers of the things they must do to prepare their properties for the fire season. It is sometimes referred to as the "fire break notice", however this term is misleading as the installation of fire breaks is only one of the required fire mitigation measures.

The authority for local governments to issue these instructions is provided under section 33 of the Bush Fires Act 1954. Landowners or occupiers who fail to comply with the conditions contained in the Fire Management Notice may be issued with a penalty of up to \$5,000 under the Act.

Is this something new?

The City of Albany issues a Fire Management Notice every year prior to the fire season. However, some of the requirements in this year's Notice are different to last year's, so please take the time to read this year's Notice carefully.

I didn't know what the Notice was so I threw it in the bin. What do I do?

The City of Albany conducts a public awareness campaign to advise land owners and occupiers of their responsibilities for preparing their properties for the fire season. Not reading the Notice does not provide an excuse for not complying with the legal requirements contained in the Notice. The information is also available on the City of Albany website at www.albany.wa.gov.au or contact the City of Albany Rangers on 9841 9349 to request a replacement copy.

What do I do if I didn't receive the Fire Management Notice?

The City posts a hard copy of the notice to all landowners. If you didn't receive the Notice in the mail, you are still bound by the requirements of the Notice. The Notice is also available on our website www.albany.wa.gov.au or contact the City of Albany Rangers on 9841 9349 to request a replacement copy.

I live in town - do I need to comply with the Notice?

Yes. All residents who own or occupy land within the City of Albany area are required to ensure that they comply with the Notice; this includes the suburban areas.

What is the "Fire Season"?

The fire season refers to the period when bush fires are likely to start and spread rapidly which is determined by climatic factors. The City of Albany covers over 4,000km² so people living in the north east section of the City experience different climatic conditions to those living in the south west corner. Therefore different fire season dates apply depending on where you live:

- North east sector – 1 November 2016 to 30 April 2017 (unless otherwise advised)
- South west sector – 1 December 2016 to 30 April 2017 (unless otherwise advised)

Click here for a map showing the two sectors.

In addition, seasonal changes may impact on the fire season dates. For example, a late hot spell may cause the fire season dates to be extended. Any changes to the dates will be advertised in the local newspapers and on the City of Albany website.

I cannot meet the requirements by the due date deadline, can I get an extension?

Reducing the risk of bush fire is a shared responsibility between local government, state government agencies and the community: we all have our part to play. Land owners and occupiers are responsible for making sure their properties are compliant with the requirements of the Fire Management Notice by the due date to reduce the level of bush fire risk for the whole community and, therefore, extensions will not be granted.

Variations to Fire Management Requirements

What do I do if I can't meet some or all of the Fire Management Requirements?

If you are unable to comply with some or all of the conditions contained in the Notice, you may be able to apply for a Variation to the Fire Management Notice.

How do I apply for a Variation to the Fire Management Notice?

Applications for a Variation can be obtained by:

- Downloading a form from the City's website at www.albany.wa.gov.au
- In person from the City of Albany offices at 102 North Road, Yakamia.
- Email staff@albany.wa.gov.au.

How do I know if I'm eligible for a Variation?

Applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis. For example, you may be eligible for a variation if your land is inaccessible due to it being rocky, steep, fragile or permanently water-logged or if you are unable to comply with the asset protection zone due to the distance between your house or outbuilding and your boundary.

How long does a Variation last?

Currently all variations will expire April 2018. The City will be reviewing this expiration date and holders of variations will be advised of any changes. Please ensure that you keep the City informed of any changes to your contact details so we can keep you informed.

Why do I have to keep applying for a Variation when my property never changes?

The fire management requirements determined by the City of Albany and contained in the Fire Management Notice may change from year to year. This means that land owners and occupiers need to read the Notice each year and determine if there are any of the requirements for which they need to seek a variation.

What is the cut-off date for variations?

All forms must be received by the City of Albany no later than 15 September 2016. Late applications may not be considered.

How will I know if my application for a variation has been accepted?

The City of Albany Rangers will advise you in writing of the outcome of your application. Please note that all of the requirements stipulated in this Notice for which a variation has not been granted must be complied with.

What happens if my application for a variation is declined?

You will be notified in writing and you will be required to comply with the conditions outlined in the Fire Management Notice before the due date.

Who can help me complete my variation application?

There is information on the City of Albany website to assist you in completing your application. In addition your local Volunteer Fire Brigade Fire Control Officer may be able to assist or contact the City of Albany Rangers.

Fire Breaks and Low Fuel Zones

Do I need to maintain my firebreaks and low fuel zones throughout the whole fire season?

Yes. It is the owners or occupier's responsibility to maintain their fire breaks and low fuel zones, including asset protection zones, until 30 April the following year (unless otherwise notified). This may mean slashing or spraying any re-growth.

Do I have to clear all vegetation around my house to put in an asset protection zone?

No, an asset protection zone (APZ) is a 20 metre low-fuel zone around your home, outbuildings and sheds. It can be achieved by:

- Maintaining a minimum 2 metre gap between trees and the building.
- Make sure that no trees overhang the house.
- Ensuring tree crowns are a minimum of 10 metres apart.
- Ensuring there is a gap between shrubs and buildings of three times their mature height.
- Ensuring shrubs aren't planted in clumps.
- Keeping the grass short and prune the scrub so that it is not dense, nor does it have fine, dead aerated material in the crown of the scrub.
- Raking up leaf litter and twigs under trees and remove trailing bark.
- Pruning lower branches (up to 2 metres off the ground) to stop a surface fire spreading to the canopy of the trees.
- Creating a mineral earth firebreak.
- Having your paths adjacent to the building and have your driveway placed so that it maximises the protection to the house.

I can't put in a 20 metre asset protection zone as my block isn't big enough. What do I do?

The asset protection zone (APZ) should be confined within the property boundary. For existing buildings that are located less than 20 metres from a property boundary, the APZ does not have to extend over that boundary.

How will reducing the fuel loads on my property make a difference if a fire comes through?

Reducing the fuel loads around your home means that embers from a bush fire will have less chance to catch fire when they hit the ground. This will also help reduce the damage caused by the fire and slow the rate of spread of the fire. The more you prepare your property the better the chance it will survive a bushfire, even if you are not there.

Why does a fire break have to be 3 metres wide with 4 metres vertical clearance?

This is the minimum width and height clearance require to allow a City of Albany fire vehicle to access your property.

Do my fire breaks have to cover my whole property?

Perimeter fire breaks are required on properties larger than 4,000m², and must be located as close as possible to the boundary. Where obstructions occur, the fire break should be constructed within 20 meters of the property boundary.

If there is a tree on my boundary that is obstructing the installation of a firebreak do I have to remove the tree?

No. You do not need to remove the tree. You can place a firebreak within 20 metres from your boundary.

What if my property is water-logged at the start of the fire season can I apply for a variation for that period only?

While a portion of the property is water-logged, it will not burn and therefore does not constitute a fire risk. However, as the property dries out, then fire breaks are required to be installed as per the provisions of the Notice. Please note that compliance inspections are carried out at random and may occur at any time during the fire season.

My next door neighbour hasn't installed their fire breaks. What can I do to report it and have them comply as well?

You can contact the City of Albany Rangers to lodge a complaint. They may then investigate the issue and take appropriate action.

I have animals grazing my paddocks. Do I still need to install a fire break?

If you are a bona fide primary producer and have animals grazing your paddocks as part of farming operations throughout the fire season and the grass is grazed to a height of 50mm or less, you may be able to apply for a variation to fire management requirements.

I have recently purchased a property and I was not aware of the fire management requirements. What do I do?

If you have recently purchased a property and you are unable to comply with the requirements contained in the Notice by the due date, please contact the City of Albany Ranger Team.

Can you recommend a fire break contractor?

The City is unable to recommend a particular contractor. However, check the ACCI directory under Firebreaks or Earthmoving for local contractors.

I have engaged a contractor to maintain my fire breaks for me, what do I need to do?

As the property owner or occupier you are responsible to ensure that the works completed by your contractor comply with the standards stipulated in the Notice.

I have engaged a contractor but he can't put the fire breaks in in time. What do I need to do?

Fire break contractors do get very busy, so it is important that you book your contractor in good time to avoid receiving a penalty for non-compliance.

Where do I find more information about preparing my home for bush fires?

Please visit the Department of Fire and Emergency Services website at www.dfes.wa.gov.au

Bush Fire Management Plans

What is a Bush Fire Management Plan?

Within the context of the Notice, a Bush Fire Management Plan is a document submitted by developers at the time of creating a new sub-division which provides details of the bush fire mitigation measures that are to be put in place for that sub-division. This may include strategic fire breaks, emergency access ways or fire service routes. The plan may also include areas that are to be maintained as low-threat vegetation.

It is important that land owners or occupiers are aware of the provisions of these plans and that any measures that have been put into place are maintained.

There is a strategic fire break in place for my sub-division. Do I still need to install perimeter fire breaks on my property?

Some sub-divisions may have strategic fire breaks in place as part of the Fire Management Plan for that area. Only properties that directly abut the strategic fire break are deemed to be covered by that fire break. All other requirements listed in the Notice must be complied with, which may include the need for the installation of a perimeter fire break.

Compliance

Will anyone check my property?

The City of Albany Rangers will conduct random inspections of properties throughout the municipality to check for compliance with the fire management requirements. Please note that Ranges will be checking on compliance with ALL the fire mitigation requirements, not just perimeter fire breaks.

Can the Rangers enter my property without my permission?

Yes, under the *Bush Fires Act 1954*, as authorised Fire Control Officers, Rangers are permitted to enter your property to undertake inspections to ensure compliance with the City's Fire Management Notice.

What happens if my property is not compliant?

The City of Albany considers non-compliance with the Fire Management Notice to be a serious offence as it compromises the safety of the whole community. If you fail to meet the requirements stipulated in the Notice, you will most likely receive a \$250 fine. You will then have seven days in which to ensure your property is compliant.

The property will be re-inspected after this period. If still non-compliant the City will engage a contractor to carry out the work and you will be billed for this work along with any associated administrative costs.

I received a fine at the end of the fire season. I cleared my block at the start of the fire season so why didn't you check it then?

All landowners and occupiers have a responsibility to maintain their land in accordance with the fire management requirements throughout the fire season. Rangers will carry out inspections at any time during the fire season, and non-compliant properties may be subject to penalties, regardless of whether or not the block was previously compliant.

Why do the Rangers seem to be only inspecting my area and not others?

Rangers will carry out random inspections on properties throughout the municipality. Areas that are deemed to be of higher risk from bush fires may be assigned priority by the City. If you have any concerns regarding a property that may constitute a high bush fire risk, please contact the Rangers.

General

There is a City reserve that doesn't have fire breaks, why do I need to have breaks if the City doesn't comply?

Fire mitigation activities within the City of Albany reserves are directed by a comprehensive fire management plan that takes into account the risk of fire posed by each reserve to the community as well as environmental considerations. The City's Reserves Team has an extensive hazard reduction programme in place for its reserves which include prescribed burns as well as mechanical mitigation measures.