

## 6 Stages of Prescribed Burning

*This Stages of Prescribed Burning information is adapted from an online resource from South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources. Images: George Aldridge*  
<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/goodliving/posts/2016/05/6-stages-prescribed-burn>

**Why implement a burn?** - Prescribed burns aim to minimise the risk and impact of bushfires by reducing fuel loads in at-risk areas.

### Stage 1 - Determining the best place to conduct a burn

During the planning process, fire management officers from the relevant land management agency/agencies assess the risk to nearby assets like homes and farms to make sure that prescribed burning will reduce the risk to these properties if there's a bushfire.



### Stage 2 – Assessment of environmental values

Surveys are undertaken to identify important plants, animals and cultural sites that need to be protected. In these instances, the prescribed burn is planned in such a way that vulnerable species or precious sites are unaffected (or potential impacts are minimised)



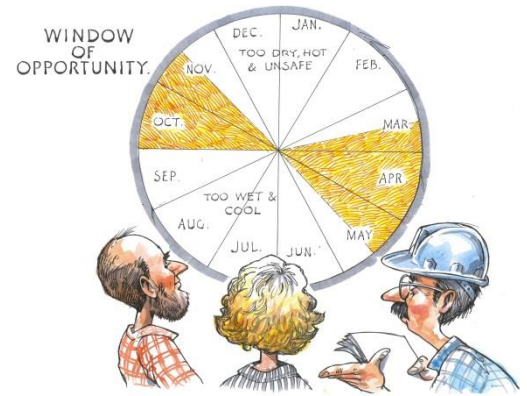
### Stage 3 – Developing a burn plan

The location of fire trucks and crew are planned months in advance so everyone stays safe when the burn is underway. This planning includes determining the number and type of vehicles needed, as well as how many crew need to be on hand. This is all to make sure the burn is conducted safely and without escapes.



#### Stage 4 – Determining when to burn

Experienced fire crew look closely at weather patterns to figure out the safest and most effective time to get out into the field. Generally autumn and spring are the best seasons to burn in.



#### Stage 5 – Implementing the burn

The prescribed burning day has arrived. There's a lot that needs to be ticked off the checklist for the burn to go ahead. Weather is the most important factor for safe burning, which includes appropriate wind direction and speed, relative humidity, temperate and fuel moisture. A test burn is carried out before the real thing takes place, and the fire is then extinguished and the area monitored for days after the exercise.



#### Stage 6 – Site recovery

In the months following a prescribed burn, plants regrow and animals return. Fire officers monitor the landscape and make sure that any necessary treatments are undertaken, such as weeding.



## Bushfire hazard reduction and Blue Mountains Bushcare Sites

The following questions about fire and bushcare sites were raised by members of the Blue Mountains Bushcare Network and the answers prepared by Peter Belshaw (Program Leader, Bushfire & Emergency Management) and Hugh Patterson (Nature Conservation Council representative on Blue Mountains Bush Fire Management Committee). The responses relate primarily to Council owned land including bushcare sites.

### What is the level of bushfire risk associated with our Blue Mountains Bushcare sites?

Through the development of the Blue Mountains Bush Fire Risk Management Plan, all residential areas at the bushland interface have been assessed as being at extreme risk of bushfire. Intuitively we tend to think that some areas are less likely to burn than others, however, all planning occurs in the context of the worst case scenario (a Fire Danger Rating of Catastrophic). Under these conditions fire may approach from any direction and spotfires can occur many kilometres from the main fire front. As such, the planning framework treats all sites as being equal and the same methodologies (APZs, prescribed burning) are applied regardless of location.

### What bushfire risk management activities are likely to be implemented on or bushcare site?

Most natural vegetation in the Blue Mountains is considered fire prone (will sustain a bushfire). It is a statutory requirement that all land owners and managers take practicable steps to reduce the threat of fire occurring on their land, so fire mitigation is an integral part of land management strategies in natural areas. Creation of asset protection zones (fire breaks) close to homes and prescribed burning are the most likely bushfire risk management strategies that will be seen on Bushcare sites.

### What can the bushcare groups do to support bushfire risk management?

Discuss broader land management issues with your Bushcare or support officer, including the requirements for fire management within your site. Bushcare and bushfire management are not mutually exclusive, but some activities, such as planting close to homes, should be avoided. Being aware of fire mitigation requirements will help guide Bushcare activities across the site.

### When is the best time for bushfire risk reduction activities?

Across all the public land management agencies, hundreds of individual fire mitigation activities will be occurring on an ongoing basis in natural areas. Fire mitigation work may be undertaken on your site at any time of year depending on the type of work, so have a discussion with your Bushcare or support officer as soon as possible if you have any questions or concerns.

### When and who can I contact for further information?

Always contact the relevant Council Bushcare officer in the first instance with any enquiries related to your bushcare site.

**Bushcare sites are often located near houses. What measures are taken along these boundaries to protect homes?**

Council only creates and maintains asset protection zones (APZ's) immediately adjacent to homes where sufficient separation from bushland cannot be achieved within private property. Council does not arbitrarily clear along public/private land boundaries. Council only clears where a portion of the required separation distances extends onto Council land, and currently maintains approximately 300 APZs across the city.

**An area we are aware of has recently had fire management plans imposed that included a 30-metre buffer (we assume this is an Asset Protection Zone) across the site – now the site has lost half its bush. Are we likely to see this happen to other Bushcare sites?**

Yes. Council currently maintains approximately 300 APZs on Council managed land across the city. NPWS, Crown Lands and other public authorities are likely to maintain as many again. Any bushland reserve where homes are located close to the boundary may require an APZ. Practices used by public authorities to identify where APZs are required and how they are created vary between organisations.

**What management strategies are in place to deal with APZs and Hazard Reduction Burns in relation to Endangered Ecological Communities, particularly those present on Bushcare sites?**

An environmental assessment is almost always undertaken before hazard reduction work is undertaken on public lands. This assessment will identify the presence of EECs, threatened species and other significant environmental considerations. The approval pathway (there are several) will determine the specific impact mitigation measures required on a site specific basis.

**Is there a guideline or template to determine whether fire management would be beneficial for a Bushcare site?**

Not specifically. All Bushcare sites should be considered to be fire prone areas so fire management should form part of any management strategy for the area. Speak to your Bushcare officer so they can facilitate input from fire management staff.

A number of publications and reports are available that include broad fire interval thresholds for the ecological units found in the Blue Mountains. If the time since last fire is lower or longer than these thresholds, then development of a fire management strategy may be useful.

**Is it feasible for volunteers to be using fire as an environmental management tool and what are the safety considerations?**

There are many issues that need to be considered when using fire, as there are significant risks to both Bushcare volunteers (WH&S) and public safety. It is unlikely that the use of fire by volunteers alone would be supported. Fire can be incorporated into site management but this needs to be coordinated through Council with the assistance of the fire services.