Protecting your house against forest fires

If you live in a rural area then your property maybe at risk should a forest fire start in the vicinity. The best way to protect against this is to clean your land to avoid a fire spreading to your property.

Decree-law 124/2006 of 28th June, amended by Decree Law 15/2009 of 14th January; 17/2009 of 14th January; 114/2001 of 30th November, and 83/2014 covers the following.

BEFORE 15TH MARCH 2018 IT IS MANDATORY TO CLEAN YOUR LAND

Cleaning or what government refers to as “Fuel management” should be conducted around the following:

- Roads and access routes including private ones
- Dwellings (isolated or in a group)
- Warehouses and workshops
- Campsites and landfills
- Factories and industrial buildings
- Other buildings such as schools, health centres, hospitals, nursing homes etc.

FAILURE TO CLEAN YOU LAND CAN MEAN YOU ARE LIABLE TO A FINE
It is mandatory for owners to carry out fuel in a range of 50 m around those buildings or facilities measured from the exterior masonry of the building, accordance with the following standards

- **Knowing the problem** - Managing fuel (items that are inflammable such as bushes trees etc.), in other words, knowing and managing the environment in the surrounding area - is the best way to protect your house.
- **Define the Protection area.** A minimum range of 50 meters for isolated buildings, factories, warehouses, reduces the chances of a fire getting near your property. Failure to do this can result in a fine.
- For population clusters such as groups of houses (condominiums for example), campsites, industrial parks, landfills, 100 meters
- **Reducing the most flammable vegetation.** Give priority to a 10 meter watering area around the property avoiding the planting of inflammable vegetation.
- **Thinning and pruning.** It is important this is done regularly giving priority to weak or ill trees.
- **Keep the surrounding area cleaned.** Do not keep firewood, forest or agricultural debris, or any type of inflammable material within a 50 meter distance to the property, except when kept in separate buildings.
- **Non-flammable pavement area.** Keep an area of between 1 and 2 meters of pavement around the building, if possible. These should be made of crushed stone, course stones, cement etc. around the entire building
- **Unobstructed access.** Make a protection area of 10 meters on the vehicular access side of the property so that large emergency vehicles can manoeuvre,
- **Clean the roof and other structures of the house.** Remove dried grass, dead leaves, pine needles, tree branches and moss from the roofing gutters, eaves and in wooden decking. Bushes must be at least 5 meters away from the building and must never extend over the roof.
- **Safety in your house.** Place a net for the retention of sparks in the chimney and close any gaps where sparks may enter the interior of your home.
- **Be prepared in case of fire** – Store shovels, rakes and hoses in an easily accessible location

Owners, tenants, users or other entities that have properties within the 50 meters range are responsible for fuel management.

**Other distances:**

- The distance from the tops of trees to the outside house walls must not be less than 5 meters
- The distance between the trees measured from the branches themselves (not the trunks) should not be less than 4 meters.
- For population clusters such as groups of houses (condominiums for example), campsites, industrial parks, landfills, 100 meters

Clearly the management of the 50 -100 meters protection range could be a joint responsibility between you and your neighbours. It is important therefore to discuss this with them and work out a division of responsibility.
The whole legislation applies to forest trees, such as pines, eucalyptus, cork trees, oaks etc, this legislation does not apply to species of the agricultural type, such as vineyards and olive trees.

The fines
For 2018, the Fines outlined in Article 38, 9 for non-compliance outlined in 124/2006 of 28th June have been doubled. For a single taxpayer these range from €280 to €10000 and for collective taxpayers from €1600 to €120,000

AFTER 15TH MARCH INSPECTION OF PROPERTIES IS MANDATORY

References
Decree-law 124/2006 of 28th June
Safe Communities Portugal newsletter April 2017
Safe Communities Portugal – Forest fire protection
Non-compliance with fuel management (cleaning of land) provisions - rights of neighbours
National Civil Protection Authority – Prevention and Protection Forest Fires