

8 March 2018

## Welcome

Welcome to our 5th Definitive Guide to Rural Fire Protection and Land Cleaning. This special updated edition supersedes the edition dated 1st March which was produced marking Civil Protection Day.

The updates are shown in black bold text, and are developments since then. This latest version also includes an introduction by Tenente Coronel Joaquim Delgado Director SEPNA GNR.



Providing a safe environment is important to our quality of life here in Portugal. Fires in rural areas pose a risk to communities including: ourselves, our families, friends, animals and properties.

We must therefore do what we can to help reduce the fire risk through cleaning our land by 15th March 2018. An important step is creating awareness, and this is the aim of this campaign and guide - getting key information across so the protection steps can be taken.

This guide cannot provide all the answers, as the laws can be quite complicated and are frequently changing, but I hope it will help address the most important issues and where clarification is required, provide the necessary contacts where further information can be found.

It is clear many people are concerned that they may get fined for some minor infringement by not complying strictly with the law within the time limit. Fines, however, are the last resort and the whole object of the exercise is to make a start in protecting all of us and our property from rural fires.

Much of it is common sense and when deciding what needs to be cleaned simply look at your land and ask a simple question - does this constitute a fire risk? If it does take action. Also even if your land is not affected by the laws, keeping it clean will help protect your house should a fire breakout nearby.

The information included in this guide and Portugal News supplement are from official government channels, namely the ICNF, ANPC and GNR and are published in accordance with the national protocols between SCP and the departments concerned.

I would therefore like to thank Rui Almeida Head of the Forest Fire Defence Division ICNF, Tenente Coronel Joaquim Delgado Director of SEPNA GNR, and Comandant Vaz Pinto Operational Commander of the ANPC Faro for preparing introductions dedicated to this newsletter and the Portugal News/SCP supplement which was published on 23rd February 2018.

Please also refer to the SCP Feature on page 49 of the Algarve Resident dated 8th March 2018.

Please share this with others, especially those living in rural areas.

Finally I would like to thank [Ibex Insurance](#), [Destination Algarve](#), [Algarve Homes](#) and [Mestre Raposa](#) or sponsoring this newsletter. If you would like to be part of a community effort to promote crime prevention and public safety, we are pleased to hear from you. Please contact [us here](#).

## Why such a Campaign is important

The Portugal News and Safe Communities Portugal are pleased to join forces to form a Rural Fire Prevention and Protection Campaign to help create awareness among the community and steps that we can all take to prevent and protect our homes, ourselves and families against rural fires.

For the last four years Safe Communities Portugal has produced online its Definitive Guide to Rural Fire Protection and Land Cleaning, based on information provided to us by the ANPC and the GNR, as well as other sources. This year we are taking it a further step forward to reflect the importance of this issue.

Last year we saw some of the most devastating fires in our history resulting in over 100 deaths, damage and destruction of property, the environment and over 520,000 hectares of land burned - nearly 6% of Portugal's entire land area. The losses were considerable, and as a result government has made changes in law as well as some new regulations to help prevent and tackle fires in the future. Most importantly however, has been the clear message that the laws concerning the cleaning of land MUST be properly enforced with money provided to Councils to ensure this is done.

Given the overgrown state of the country and the lack of forestry management in many places, clearly this may not be achieved overnight, but working on a priority basis using the resources provided, much can be achieved this year.

I hope therefore that readers will find this "Definitive Guide to Rural Fire Prevention and Land Cleaning", helpful. It will also be made available on our websites and Facebook page.

This and the [supplement](#) produced jointly by Safe Communities Portugal and the Portugal News are aimed at creating greater awareness of what we can all do to prevent rural fires by the regular cleaning of our land. If we do not we will destroy our environment, as well as placing lives and property at risk, not to mention those who have deal with such incidents sometimes on a huge scale.

## Prime Minister - Cleaning up land is "an effort that involves the whole of society

"It is essential that everyone is aware that there is a need to clean up the bushes and trees around houses and villages, in order to reduce the risk of fire next summer," he said.

Speaking in Tondela recently, the Prime Minister António Costa said "we have a duty to reduce the risk of fires. The law has imposed for over 10 years, very clear obligations to all: in the 50 meters around each house and in the 100 meters around each settlement land must be cleaned, as well as on the banks of the roads, also underneath the high voltage lines."

This cleaning effort "we have to do now". "By March 15 it is the duty of all owners to carry out this cleaning", he added. As of March 15, municipalities have all the power to enter private properties and do what the owners have not done. What's more, they have the right to take possession of those lands and to charge, either for the sale of woody material or for the exploitation of the land, the expenses they have for the owners who have not done what they have to do", he said.

António Costa emphasized that "this is an effort that involves the whole society, and cannot be assured only by the presidents of Parish Councils, Municipal Councils, or Government".

"The work we have for the whole country is enormous. And so either we all do this work now or it will be impossible to do it, "he said.

He added that "the reality is that living today is different from what we have known in the past". The forest is more disordered and we are living in the second consecutive year of drought - climate change is a reality that changes the conditions in which we live".

The Prime Minister said that "the ICNF has already identified, in the whole of the country, the 19 highest-risk areas of fire next summer, based on the type of forest, climatic conditions, fire history and more of 180 counties, more than a thousand parishes and thousands of villages."

## Introductions

### Rui Almeida - Head of Forest Fire Defence Division - ICNF

Fires which break out in the countryside throughout mainland Portugal and Madeira, are more frequent and cause more damage during drier periods. In Portugal, drier periods are naturally more common at hotter times of year.

Such fires are mostly caused by people, so if we change our behaviour we can significantly reduce the number of fires.

Fires affect areas of forest and farmland and, in recent years, due to longer periods of lower humidity and less rainfall, considerable damage has been caused to buildings, goods and properties, not to mention the loss of human and animal lives.

The preventative measures that every person and every household can take are extremely important in reducing the risks.

First of all, take a look at the area surrounding your property to see if the minimum safety conditions have been met, in accordance with the information produced by the ICNF shown in this supplement.

Secondly, make sure you always have something to hand - especially water - that you can use to put out any small fires that might break out. When there is a fire, the first signs that it is approaching are the smell of burning and the smoke. As soon as you notice these, be alert and check on the ANPC website to see if there are any fires near you. Work out a plan in advance for the evacuation of your family members and animals to safe meeting points.

If you are unsure about anything, ask for help and advice from your municipal council's Forestry Office (Gabinete Técnico Florestal).

### Tenente-Coronel Joaquim Eduardo Delgado, Director of SEPNA GNR

Portugal is one of the European countries most affected by rural fires in recent years. As for the burned areas and the number of ignitions, the figures have been very high, which in itself is a concern.

The problem of rural fires in Portugal is a cross-cutting concern to all Portuguese society. A large number of rural fires originate from human action, including the misuse of fire and risk behaviour.

As a result of previous rural fires, it is worth highlighting the loss of human lives and the considerable decrease in the productive capacity of the forestry sector. It is therefore necessary to intervene strongly in the area of prevention, in particular through awareness-raising and through inspections.

Urban sprawl in rural areas is dramatically increasing the area of urban settlements in contact with forest areas. This gives rise to a high risk of ignitions resulting from human activities, with the consequent danger of fires affecting homes and other urban infrastructures, including endangering human lives.

The phenomenon of rural fires at the urban-forest interface (IUF), i.e. the transition zone between settlements and the forest, is the main concern, since the accumulated fine dead fuels increase the occurrence of fires that are characterised by their intensity and the proximity of built areas to an unprecedented reality.

Awareness raising / monitoring actions are an important way to prevent and raise awareness of the problem of forest fire protection. The message to be transmitted therefore should be an incentive to good practices and respect for nature, also safeguarding sustainability and the future of our forests, as well as instilling within the community the need for strict compliance with the legally implemented measures to reduce the number of ignitions and the intensity / danger of the fires when they occur.

The National Republican Guard (GNR) is the entity responsible for the 2nd pillar of the National Forest Fire Protection System (SNDFCI), that is, for operational prevention, in the coordination of surveillance, detection and inspection actions.

The IUF areas need a more incisive and persistent approach on the part of the authorities, in order to provide citizens with information, so they can act within their capacity by identifying dangerous

situations that disrespect the rules.

It is necessary to develop knowledge of the risk factors that lead households and other infrastructures to be vulnerable to IUF fires and to take self-protection measures adapted to local conditions. These measures may involve the management of fuels through civic-cultural activities and the use of deforestation, which will support and facilitate the fight against rural fires, thus contributing to their rapid extinction.

It is important to analyse the history of rural fires, to identify areas at risk, in order to direct the actions of sensitization and inspection to certain target audiences.

In addition to the targeted actions, the launch of effective awareness campaigns for the general population and students in particular deserves particular attention.

Negligent acts have been the main cause of rural fires, which reinforces the importance of awareness-raising and enforcement actions, with the aim of encouraging the correct use of fire and the maintenance of fuel management bands.

Awareness-raising actions are a first approach in preventing the problem of rural fires, contributing to the reduction of risk, which is not a deterrent in a second approach and in situations of gross non-compliance with the obligation to maintain fuel management bands. to carry out an effective inspection and to review the respective records.

The GNR promotes awareness among the population and, especially in the school communities, to raise awareness of the importance of a whole set of preventive procedures to be adopted, namely on the use of fire, cleaning and removal of weeds and maintenance of fuel management bands.

## **Vitor Vaz Pinto, Operational Commander of the Algarve, National Civil Protection Authority**

In recent decades forest fires have become an increasing concern for mainland Portugal, and in recent years have reached enormous dimensions, both in terms of size and intensity, drastically affecting not only ecosystems, but also, sadly, the population and their belongings.

2017 was catastrophic. A lack of forest management coupled with a lack of intervention/maintenance of forest fire protection networks, harsh weather and an unprepared population in terms of self-protection measures to be adopted, fuelled the tragic outcome.

In the Algarve, while the hot weather recorded was the second most severe in the last decade and the number of fires was higher than the decade's average, the results obtained in 2017 were rather favourable.

However, in spite of the work carried out in terms of structural prevention, awareness-raising, surveillance and the enormous effort made to set up special fire-fighting resources to meet the operational needs of the Region, we know that the Algarve is vulnerable to large fires.

However, we also know that the response mechanism in place in the Region has proved highly efficient year-after-year, even though the land use planning of the Algarve's rural and forested areas does not yet guarantee sustainability of the results achieved.

In recent years we have been working towards improving the practices, methodologies and procedures in operations, through the implementation of operational training for all civil protection officers and entities that cooperate in the field of fire prevention.

Specific focus has been placed on the security and safety of populations and their assets. In this context, the citizen plays a fundamental role in front-line civil protection, and must be prepared for and aware of the risks to which they are exposed, as well understanding self-protection measures needed to protect themselves and fellow citizens.

After the fires of 2017, the Resolution of the Council of Ministers no. 157-A/2017, of October 27, was published, which advocates, in the context of strengthening population security, a set of measures aimed at creating programs such as the 'Safe People' and 'Safe Village' programs, whose purpose is to raise awareness and establish structural measures for the protection of people and goods, as well as buildings within the urban-forest interface, through the involvement of citizens and various entities, including local authorities.

The involvement of society as a whole is therefore of paramount importance in keeping citizens and communities informed about the measures to be taken in the event of a fire. Clearing land around properties must be a priority, in accordance with the laws in force, to create a barrier so that in the event of a fire, material and, fundamentally, human damages are as minimal as possible, given that the means of combating fires are limited.

We have every confidence in these strategies and procedures, which have shown improvements, as well as being sure that efforts to optimise resources and competencies will be pursued with the same ongoing commitment by all and as always, to make the Algarve increasingly safer and resilient.

Concluding, and citing Alexandre Herculano: "It is the progress of ideas that brings change, not the progress of errors that makes them inevitable."  
Faro, 20 February, 2018

## Good reasons to protect our properties against rural fires

2017 was perhaps one of the most destructive years for forest fires with a total of over 100 lives lost, countless numbers of properties destroyed and damaged, people made homeless and out of work and over 520,000 hectares of land burned.

An analysis of the causes of fires undertaken by the GNR shows the following out of 17,090 investigations undertaken.

Cause	Number	Percentage
Negligence	5808	33.9%
Intentional	3405	19.9%
Re-ignitions	1749	10.2%
Natural	135	0.7%
Unknown	6493	37.9%
Total	17,090	

As can be seen fires cause by negligence amount to around one third of all fires. A large component of this is through the burning of debris and land through cleaning, when the fire has become out of control. It is important therefore to undertake cleaning in a responsible way, which has therefore been covered in this guide.

## The law concerning the cleaning of land (fuel management)

### Article 153.º of the Annual Budget of 2018

During the year 2018, the work defined in number 2 of article 15 of Decree-Law no. 124/2006, of 28 June, must occur up to 15 March, in its current version, regardless of the existence or approval of a Municipal Plan Forest Protection against Fire (PMDFCI).

During the year 2018, the fines referred to Article 38 of Decree-Law No. 124/2006, of June 28, in its current version, **are increased to double.**

By May 31, 2018, the Municipalities must ensure the completion of all works and should replace the owners and other non-compliant forest producers, by undertaking fuel management provided by law, by means of a communication and, in the absence of a reply within five days, by posting on the work places.

In the case of replacement referred in the previous paragraph, owners and other forest producers are obliged to allow access to their land and to reimburse the Municipalities of the expenses incurred with the fuel management.

In order to comply with the provisions of this article, in particular the execution of the work which are necessary for full compliance with the preventive measures referred to in paragraphs 1 and 3, the municipalities rely on the collaboration of the of the police forces.

## How "Rural areas" are defined

One new major change is in terminology, from "Forest" fires to "Rural fires", which is now used by the ICNF in their latest publications regarding land management.

In simplest terms rural areas consist of all areas which are not "urban". They also include agricultural land.

Likewise the ANPC itself in its operational situation page, includes under the heading "Incendios Rurais", bush, agricultural and "forest" fires.

The reason for this change is that in recent years fires have extended more into rural areas and have even affected villages themselves.

If in doubt then contact your local Civil Protection office or GNR.

## Protecting your house against Forest Fires - What you need to do

The National Forest Authority (ICNF) gives the basic steps to protect your house against the spread of rural fires. Remember these will not prevent a fire starting, but will help in preventing it reaching your property. This is applicable to those living in rural areas, and is mandatory by 15th March 2018.

These are divided into two groups "mandatory" and "advisable". Remember it is mandatory to manage the vegetation measured 50 metres from the exterior of your house. This must be completed by 15th March or risk a hefty fine.

To see what needs to be done please download the poster and leaflets as follows which has the information concerned.

[English Poster](#) - quick PDF download or [JPG](#)

[Portuguese poster](#) - quick PDF download or [JPG](#)

[English Leaflet](#) - quick download

[Link to ICNF page](#) with posters/leaflets

## Latest law update: law n.º10/2018, 14th February.

This new law has caused some confusion as there is a lack of clarity as to what types of land are affected by the new provisions. The following has been clarified by the ICNF:

In the area containing trees, the distance between the treetops must be at least 10 metres where the trees in question are maritime pine and eucalyptus; the trees must be pruned to 50% of their height if they are 8 metres tall or less; trees taller than 8 metres must be pruned to a height of at least 4 metres above the ground.

**Update: ICNF have explained this is intended to thin out larger areas and if you have a small group of trees that are closer than these ranges, this should not pose a problem provided the lower half is properly pruned, and the area around them is properly cleaned, dead leaves removed etc. .**

In the area containing bushes, the maximum height of the vegetation may not exceed 50 centimetres.

**Update - Note: However ICNF advises this is aimed at avoiding an overgrowth over larger areas. ICNF advise if in your garden you have individual or small groups of shrubs and bushes that exceed this height, but are properly managed, this should not pose problems. states that in well managed areas for instance**

In the area containing shrubs and scrub, the maximum height of the vegetation may not exceed 20 centimetres. However, this appears to describe wild shrub land rather than gardens where shrubs are

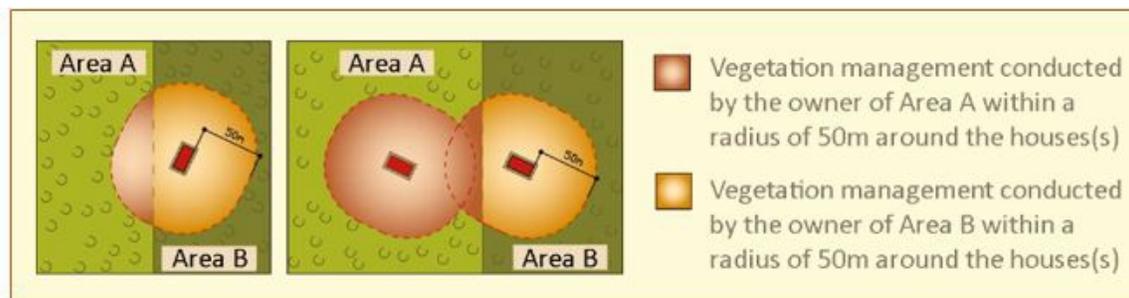
cultivated for decoration. If in doubt contact the ICNF.

Under exceptional circumstances, where the tree cover has a high property or scenic value, a distance of less than 5 metres is admissible, as long as enhanced provisions are made to keep the area clear of combustible materials both horizontally and vertically, and steps are taken to ensure that no combustible materials will accumulate on the roof of the building.

There is no need to prune fruit trees (in other words the 4 metre distance rule does not apply) but they cannot be less than 5 metres from the house or cover a roof top. **Update: This includes including Alfarroba, almond and medronho trees .**

There are many provisions in the new law, but the priority is to do the basics, i.e. clean your land using the mandatory provisions outlined in this supplement. Enquiries on the new law should be directed to ICNF or Civil Protection.

## Neighbours



Where a neighbour's land border is within 50 metres of your house, management of the 50 meter protection range becomes a joint responsibility between you and your neighbour. It is important therefore to discuss this with them and work out a division of responsibility.

In simple terms if your neighbour's land is within 50 meters of your house and needs cleaning in order to protect your property then it is the responsibility of the neighbour, which could be the owner or if let, the tenant.

The drawing refers.

## What to do if the neighbouring land has not been cleaned

This is one of the biggest problems facing landowners. If part of the neighbouring land is within 50 metres of your house then they need to comply. Sometimes such land has been abandoned and therefore become overgrown. In other instances the people may have little money to clean their land risk a fine. And unfortunately there are some who refuse to clean.

In tackling this it is best to try and speak to the neighbour first if possible. However if this is not possible or you have spoken and the owner refuses, then it should be reported to either the local the Civil Protection unit in your municipality or the GNR.

**Update: This is best reported by 15th March as it is more likely to be accorded a priority rather than left unreported.**

This will then be checked, and enforcement action taken against the owner and the land cleaned by the municipality (on a risk priority basis).

**It is realised that people may be reluctant to report for fear of creating problems with a neighbour. However if left unreported and no action is taken then it is your property that remains at risk.**

## How will these measures be enforced

In 2017, some 1686 people were fined for not managing their land. This year with far greater priority being given to this, there is the potential for these figures to rise should people not comply.

Prevention also comes before enforcement however, so campaigns are being undertaken throughout the country to create awareness among the community in order that as much land is cleaned by the 15th March. These awareness campaigns are being undertaken by the GNR, civil protection, Bombeiros and others, including volunteer organizations, through the media and visits to those in isolated areas.

The GNR and ICNF have emphasised that it is important to note that the whole object of the campaign is to ensure that the areas where the risks are high are cleaned to help protect life and property in the event of a fire. Where reports have been made to the council and or GNR, or they themselves have noted areas that are required to be cleaned, the owner or tenant will usually be warned with advice given on what needs to be done, before enforcement action is taken.

If, however, by the 15th March land has not been cleaned then a contravention order may be issued.

As far as we are aware the land owners/tenants, who do not comply after such warnings by the GNR or Civil Protection, will receive in due course a notification by post of the fine, giving the amount, how it needs to be paid and the payment deadline. Failure to do so will result in further action and the likelihood of higher penalties.

Fines: The fines for failing to clean land for 2018 have been doubled and are currently **€280 - €10,000 for individuals and €1600 - €120,000 for corporations**

In practice, if it is obvious that you are clearing your land, but not finished by the 15th March, you will likely be issued with a notice and a time line to clear it by.

## Priority areas for inspections

Dispatch no. 1913/2018 Dated **22nd February 2018**

The Government has identified 189 municipalities and 1049 parishes on the mainland that are at maximum risk and 9800 clusters of properties that are an effective priority

The priority areas for the inspection of fuel management (land cleaning) are divided into the parishes of 1st and 2nd priority, (red and orange respectively) according to the classification of the Institute of Nature and Forest Conservation, ICNF. For the Algarve a total of 24 parishes have been prioritised.

The Priority map can be downloaded [here from the ICNF website](#).

Legal Dispatch 1913/2018 [List of Priority parishes](#) in PDF

For the Algarve the Parishes are: (All highest 1 except where shown 2)

Aljezur  
Odeceixe  
Giões  
Martim Longo  
União das freguesias de Alcoutim e Pereiro Vaqueiros .  
Azinhal  
Odeleite  
Porches 2  
União das freguesias de Bensafrim e Barão de São João 2  
Alte  
Ameixial  
Salir  
União de freguesias de Querença, Tôr e Benafim  
Alferce  
Marmelete  
Monchique  
Mexilhoeira Grande 2  
São Brás de Alportel 2  
São Bartolomeu de Messines São Marcos da Serra

Silves  
Cachopo  
Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo  
União das freguesias de Conceição e Cabanas de Tavira  
União das freguesias de Tavira (Santa Maria e Santiago)

However, the definition of these priorities does not exempt compliance with all the provisions for land cleaning in areas that have not been prioritised.

It is understood that these priority areas could change in the future.

## Other matters to be aware off

### Electric/telephone wires

If there are electric or telephone wires across your property that are preventing the safe pruning of trees contact the civil protection office, EDP/MEO or the camara.

### Roads

Vegetation next to a road, should be cut back 10 metres away. If the road is public, contact the local civil protection office. Although they are responsible they may ask you to assist if your garden is within the 10 m band. If you refuse the council can clean the strip itself but in such circumstances you will not be able to claim the proceeds for the selling of wood from the trees.

The cleaning is the same as around your house e.g. 4 metres between tree tops etc. NOT everything has to be cut down.

### Protected trees

This only applies to certain types of cork trees e.g. Cork Oak and Holm Oak (Sobreido and Azinheira). If you have these on your land then contact the ICNF before you start cutting.

**Shrubs** - The law concerning the maximum height is mainly in cases where such shrubs are growing wild over a continuous area without gaps. ICNF advise that where there are well ended shrubs in gardens for instance this should not cause a problem - it is a matter of common sense.

### Protected areas

If you live in a protected area such as a national park, before cutting or cleaning contact the ICNF by email explaining what you intend to do. They will advise.

### Protected trees

There are two main ones - cork oak and holm oak. If you have these before starting work apply to ICNF using the two forms (Poda) for pruning and (Corte) for cutting down. These can be downloaded from ICNF or [SCP websites](#) and sent in the Algarve by email to [DCNF.Algarve@icnf.pt](mailto:DCNF.Algarve@icnf.pt). ICNF advise that if you have sent before 15<sup>th</sup> March and no response by then, in case of any GNR inspection, show them a copy - no problem.

It is clear that there will be many questions arising from the various legislation and it is not possible to cover everything in this article.

Much of this is common sense. In case of doubt the best action is to contact the local civil protection office (email address/and contact numbers provided, or the ICNF office.

## Clusters

When groups of houses in rural areas are located close together in a group such as for instance an urbanisation this is known as a cluster. In such cases only the external perimeter at a range of 100 metres needs to be protected.

The laws concerning the cleaning of land within that range are the same for 50m around individual houses.

If there are doubts whether you are part of a cluster then contact the GNR or Civil Protection for advice.

## What the councils should do

Councils are required to undertake work to clean land if owners refuse to do so or the owner cannot be found.

In addition to any fines the owners will be charged for this work. Clearly after many years that is a considerable work to do so this will be prioritised, depending of the level of risk to the property concerned.

## Contact information

Concerning reporting and enforcement and general matters people should contact the local councils. For the Algarve these are shown in the chart.

For matters concerning the interpretation of the laws regarding cleaning and pruning, and different types of trees, including protected trees then, contact the ICNF. For the Algarve it is : Tel: 289 700 210 Fax: 289 700 219 or email: [dcnfalg@icnf.pt](mailto:dcnfalg@icnf.pt)

**The GNR SEPNA Hotline 808 200 520 can also be contacted for advice and reporting neighbouring land that needs cleaning.**

<b>Albufeira</b>	<b><a href="mailto:protecao.civil@cm-albufeira.pt">protecao.civil@cm-albufeira.pt</a></b>	<b>289 599 503</b>
<b>Aljezur</b>	<b><a href="mailto:pcivil@cm-aljezur.pt">pcivil@cm-aljezur.pt</a></b>	<b>289 900 014</b>
<b>Alcoutim</b>	<b><a href="mailto:protecao.civil@cm-alcoutim.pt">protecao.civil@cm-alcoutim.pt</a></b>	<b>281 540 500</b>
<b>Castro Marim</b>	<b><a href="mailto:expediente@cm-castromarim.pt">expediente@cm-castromarim.pt</a></b>	<b>281 510 740</b>
<b>Faro</b>	<b><a href="mailto:cbsfaro@cm-faro.pt">cbsfaro@cm-faro.pt</a></b>	<b>289 888 000</b>
<b>Lagoa</b>	<b><a href="mailto:protecaocivil@cm-lagoa.pt">protecaocivil@cm-lagoa.pt</a></b>	<b>282 380 400</b>
<b>Lagos</b>	<b><a href="mailto:protecao.civil@cm-lagos.pt">protecao.civil@cm-lagos.pt</a></b>	<b>282 768 008</b>
<b>Loulé</b>	<b><a href="mailto:dpcv@cm-loule.pt">dpcv@cm-loule.pt</a></b>	<b>289 400 827</b>
<b>Monchique</b>	<b><a href="mailto:smpc.monchique@cm-monchique.pt">smpc.monchique@cm-monchique.pt</a></b>	<b>282 910 210</b>
<b>Olhão</b>	<b><a href="mailto:protecaocivil@cm-olhao.pt">protecaocivil@cm-olhao.pt</a></b>	<b>289 710 000</b>
<b>Portimão</b>	<b><a href="mailto:protecao.civil@cm-portimao.pt">protecao.civil@cm-portimao.pt</a></b>	<b>800 282 112</b>
<b>S.Brás de Alportel</b>	<b><a href="mailto:protecao.civil@cm-sbras.pt">protecao.civil@cm-sbras.pt</a></b>	<b>289 840 000</b>
<b>Silves</b>	<b><a href="mailto:protecao.civil@cm-silves.pt">protecao.civil@cm-silves.pt</a></b>	<b>289 840 000</b>
<b>Tavira</b>	<b><a href="mailto:bombeiros@cm-tavira.pt">bombeiros@cm-tavira.pt</a></b>	<b>281 322 122</b>
<b>Vila do Bispo</b>	<b><a href="mailto:pcivil@cm-viladobispo.pt">pcivil@cm-viladobispo.pt</a></b>	<b>282 630 600</b>
<b>Vila Real St. António</b>	<b><a href="mailto:smpc@cm-vrsa.pt">smpc@cm-vrsa.pt</a></b>	<b>281 530 190</b>

Contact details for the ICNF Algarve:

Tel: 289 700 210 Fax: (+351) 289 700 219, E-mail: [dcnfalg@icnf.pt](mailto:dcnfalg@icnf.pt)

In case of difficulty contacting the ICNF at the above email address use. [DCNF.Algarve@icnf.pt](mailto:DCNF.Algarve@icnf.pt)

## Cleaning land by burning

### Difference between burning debris and pasture renewal burning

For many of us living in rural areas the disposal of debris from tree cuttings and bushes is a constant challenge. The normal process is to burn these, but in doing so there are a number of laws that dictate when and under what conditions this is possible. Cleaning your land is essential to prevent the spread of fires so understanding the law is essential.

However, sometimes there is confusion between burning debris and pasture renewal burning. It is

important to understand the differences because the approval conditions are very different.

Debris burning (**Queima**), is used mainly in the cleaning of land before the critical fire period and takes place after bushes, shrubs, tree branches have been cut, gathered together in small piles and then burned. Do not place these piles however under trees.

Pasture renewal burning (**Queimada**) is generally for grassland renewal, the burning of stubble and forest debris that are uncut or cut on the ground, but NOT gathered into piles.

Both these types of burning are not permitted during the Critical Fire period, and when the Fire Risk is **"Very High" or "Extreme"**. It is important to note that in addition, pasture renewal burning is also NOT permitted when the fire risk is **"HIGH"**. In other words it is only permitted in Moderate or Low conditions.

## Obtaining permission/permit before lighting fires

### Debris burning

If you wish to burn debris in piles outside the critical period or when the wildfire hazard is not very high or maximum, you should telephone your local Bombeiros and obtain permission, before doing so. .

In these cases you need to call them and check whether this permissible given the weather conditions in your area. They will ask you a number of questions such as the date and the time of the burning, what you are intending to burn (items for instance such as tyres and plastics are prohibited). This is important in order that they know where controlled burning is taking place so they know it is not a fire outbreak. It is also a good habit to inform them when the burning has been completed.

### Burning of large areas - pasture renewal burning

The burning of large areas such as in pasture renewal burning is only permitted after obtaining a permit/permission from the city council or parish in your area. If it is granted it may need to be conducted in the presence of a certified firefighter or, a team of firefighters. Anyone contravening this is liable for a fine up to € 60,000. You cannot burn when the fire risk if **"High", "Very High" or "Extreme"** or during the Critical Fire period.

## Precautions to be taken when burning debris and other material

Burning debris is one of the most common ways of disposing of cut waste from your land but when uncontrolled is one of the biggest causes of rural fires.

The ICNF has provided a comprehensive list of precautions to be taken when burning debris at times when it is permissible to do so - this is known as a controlled burn. This is used to eliminate left-over materials from forestry operations or farming, such as pruned leaves and branches from vines and olive trees, among others, cut up and piled into a heap.

The precautions to be taken include when and under what conditions fires can be lit and how they should be managed. Specifically it covers issues such as: humidity, air temperature, wind, fuels, avoiding slopes; the gradual feeding of fires; monitoring fires; water supply; utensils to be available and the proper management of the aftermath during the period of extinguishing and beyond. Many fires are caused by people burning debris or land without taking the proper precautions.

These very helpful tips will allow fires to be lit and controlled, during periods where it is permitted to do so, without the risk of the fire becoming uncontrolled and threatening your life and property and that of others.

### The basics

The most basic advice is to choose cloudy days; take your mobile phone with you so you can raise the alarm in the case of fire and have someone else with you when you undertake the burn. Do not undertake controlled burns when the weather is hot and dry or when it is windy.

### How to undertake a controlled burn safely

One good piece of advice is to start the fire early in the morning when it is cooler and damper and allows you more time to monitor the fire and prevent any re-ignition late at night.

- Move the pile of left-over materials that you are going to burn away from grazing land, woods, scrubland and trees.
- Make a vegetation-free firebreak around the things that you are going to burn.
- Wet the firebreak before you start the burn.
- Have a water supply or a hose alongside the site of the burn.
- Make several small piles instead of big ones.
- Burn the left-over waste in batches.
- Stay vigilant. If any sparks fly, put them out immediately.
- Leaving a burn unattended is prohibited.
- Pay attention to changes in the wind. Protect yourself from the smoke by covering your mouth and nose with damp cloths or a smoke mask. Inhaling smoke can be fatal.
- If the burn gets out of control keep a safe distance and dial 112.

### **How to put out a controlled burn.**

It is important that these tips are followed as many fires are caused by fires that have been left to burn without being properly extinguished.

- Keep burning until only ashes are left.
- Turn over the burnt remains to see if any small flames still persist.
- Put the burn site out with water or by throwing earth on top of it.
- Do not leave the site until you have checked that there is no smoke coming from the ashes.

If you are using local farmers and/or contractors to burn debris on your land, ensure that they follow this advice. Do not allow them to set fire to a large area of uncut vegetation, as this requires a licence. If not and a fire develops causing damage to others, as the land owner you may still have some liability.

The leaflet from the ICNF in PDF format can be [downloaded here](#)

### **Precautions to be taken when burning debris and other material**

We recently received a letter from a reader (Thomas) regarding rubbish he sees whilst walking his dog in forest areas as well as dunes and beaches such as: glass, paper, cans cardboard drink containers and paper tissues etc.

As we know discarded litter especially glass bottles can be a source of fires, as well as environmental pollution.

Please think twice before discarding such litter. Being a civic minded person Thomas picks these items to avoid dangers to others. Thomas regularly picks up litter

### **KissFM - Special Crimecheck Features on Land Cleaning**

On 11th and 25th February with the agreement of KissFm, we held special Crimecheck features on Sir Owen Gee's Solid Gold Sunday on the subject of Forest Fire Prevention.

The next Crimecheck is scheduled for 24th March unless there is urgent information, which with the agreement of KissFm may necessitate an earlier Crimecheck in the meantime.

## **Prevention**

### **Communications**

Safe Communities Portugal's role includes helping to create public awareness in areas such as forest fire prevention and other areas involving civil protection.

Safe Communities Portugal recognised this problem shortly after it formed in 2012 and has engaged with the various government departments both in the Algarve and Lisbon to try and ensure greater awareness of these issues among the foreign community.

During the major fires last year SCP met with the ANPC in Lisbon and made recommendations concerning improvements in communication and some of these are now being put in place. They also met with senior officials in Lisbon concerning making available nationally, key information on property protection in English and other languages - these too are now being put in place.

There are also measures to keep people up to date of Fire risks in English and SCP is currently working with the Government to put this in place soon.

With their established national protocols with the ANPC and GNR, SCP are able to reflect the views of the community directly to senior government officials based on the feedback they have received over several years and we will continue to do so. This has included views expressed in letters to the Portugal News and others.

Given the fires last year and the various changes that have been put in place by Government, SCP have held a series of high level meetings with the Nature Conservation Institute and Forestry department (ICNF), ANPC and GNR, to help create greater awareness of the need for people to protect their properties against fires in rural areas.

As a result of this, the ICNF, have agreed that the main leaflets produced by them concerning protecting your property and burning debris will also be produced in English, (and other languages) to help non-Portuguese speaking home owners and tenants. Safe Communities is providing the translations.

This is an important step as the leaflets are applicable anywhere in the country and the information provided by the ICNF is the basis of that used by municipalities in providing their own individual leaflets. The ICNF leaflets and posters are available on line and have been circulated by the ANPC. Hard copies are planned in due course.

Throughout the year SCP will be providing updates and information as usual through our website [www.safecommunitiesportugal.com](http://www.safecommunitiesportugal.com) and our Facebook page, as well as through newsletters, KissFm, and the media we have been able to keep the community up to date with news and advice.

## Monitoring

### Monitoring weather conditions

It is particularly important during the summer months in particular to pay attention to weather forecasts and weather warnings. The best way to monitor weather conditions, the fire risk and UV risks are through the [IPMA website](#)

The IPMA has in fact made recent changes to its fire risk page with easier to read information relevant to each municipality as well as a table showing what actions are allowed or prohibited during the various risk levels.

Safe Communities Portugal provides on its Civil Protection/ Rural fires page, several links to different sites which also provide useful information related to Rural fires.

### Monitoring forest fires through the internet and social media

The ANPC (Civil Protection Agency) is the authority responsible for the coordination for dealing with major emergencies including rural fire outbreaks and the resources involved in firefighting.

All major fires are plotted and information updated regularly. If you wish to check if a major rural fire has broken out, or the progress, then you can do so through this [ANPC link](#).

During a fire there will of course be much information and photographs that are posted onto Facebook in particular. If not taken from official sources, then there is a need to be cautious until the details are verified. In a major operation coordinated by Civil Protection there are teams that monitor social media and other sources of information and check on the ground or from air in order to confirm or otherwise the information.

It is important to bear in mind that a photo of thick and large bands of smoke may not mean that the fire is heading in the direction where the person took and posted the photo.

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## Association for Forest Fire Alerts - Donations to the Bombeiros and monitoring fires

Without stating the obvious, firefighting is both dangerous and extremely physically demanding work. When the fires in Monchique broke out in 2016, the night time air temperature was around 30C and the humidity was exceptionally low at around 10%. Firefighters worked in the most hazardous conditions and for long hours.

To avoid dehydration the emergency services must have adequate supplies of drinking water. An excellent service exists through **AAiF - Association for Forest Fire Alerts**, formed by Debby Burton, to help supply the items, especially water required by fire-fighting personnel. Their objective is to ensure that all fire stations are properly supplied before the main fire period.

To do this they need your help through donations for the voluntary Bombeiros and the supply of bottled water.

In addition Forest Fire Alerts helps keep people informed about the outbreak of forest fires which provides an important service so that people know where fires are and when required can prepare themselves accordingly.

AAiF can be contacted at [bombeirosalgarve@gmail.com](mailto:bombeirosalgarve@gmail.com) and their work can be monitored on their Facebook page "Alerta de incêndio florestal / forest fire alert"

Please support their work - A great initiative.

## How NOT to monitor - visiting fire scenes

Unfortunately some people get a thrill by attending fire scenes either to see the destruction themselves, take photos or for more sinister reasons as in the case of some arsonists. There are also of course journalists whose remit is to get action photos and a story. It is called among fire fighters "Catastrophe Tourism".

Unless specifically invited by the Commanders concerned, I can assure you that such presence is unwelcome. This is because such presence detracts firefighters from their important work, and may put your own and others at risk.

Secondly unauthorised vehicles heading to fire scenes causes traffic problems and impede the progress of the emergency vehicles heading to the incident. Imagine a vehicle parked on a narrow road to Monchique, left unattended whilst the occupants are taking photos elsewhere!

## Protection in case of a Forest Fire

### Contacting the Emergency Services

In case of fire or any other emergency you should dial **112**.

This is for emergency use only and should not be used for non-emergencies. Simply state the nature of the emergency, your name and exactly where you are. The operator's standard of English is generally good, but it is essential to speak clearly giving your name, location and nature of the

emergency.

If you need to contact the Bomberios the contact details for each municipality can be found by [clicking here](#). Do not phone them to report emergencies, as all calls should be made to the emergency number. The reason for this is that the emergency centres form a coordination point with police and other services, such as ambulance or police, may also be required.

When dealing with an emergency it is important to remain calm and follow the emergency centre operator's advice. It is also essential that these numbers are only used in a genuine emergency, as non-emergency calls can result in delayed response to those requiring urgent assistance.

## Equipment to have handy

For those living in rural areas where there is a risk of forest fires it is worth considering having an emergency pack available should a fire break out.

The ANPC have produced comprehensive guidelines covering this subject which can be downloaded from their website in Portuguese. An English version is as follows

Have the following spare equipment:

- Battery operated radio and flashlight, with backup batteries;
- First aid kit;
- Food and beverages in preserved packaging;
- Strong and heat insulating shoes (example: leather);
- A battery radio;

In the event that your family may be separated during a fire (when the adults are working and the children in school) develop a plan to bring it together. Use a point of contact between your family and friends. Make sure everyone knows your name, address and phone number;

The above are basic steps and you may wish to supplement these items if you are living in a high risk area, particularly during the summer.

Have these items together with a rucksack available if you have to leave the property quickly.

## What to do if affected by a Forest Fire

If unfortunately if there is a fire in your area there are steps that should be taken to help safeguard your property and yourself and family. . The ANPC have produced guidelines on what actions you should take, including actions during and after a fire.

These have been translated into English and it is recommended that these are downloaded and printed and kept in an easy to reach place should a fire break out.

The guidelines can be [downloaded here](#).

## Property Insurance - Fires

It goes without saying that if you live in a rural area property insurance including the risk of fires is very important. It is also important that you check your clauses carefully as some elements of protection of property is mandatory.

For instance one clause sometimes used is very general, but if you are not compliant with the law concerning the protection of your home, this could invalidate the insurance in the event of a claim:

*"Law applicable to the Contract*

*You and We are free to choose the law applicable to this contract but in the absence of agreement to the contrary, the law of the country in which You reside at the date of the contract (or in the case of a business, the law of the country in which the registered office or principal place of business) will apply".*

Advice is to check with your insurance company or broker concerning any clauses you should be

aware of in the event of a fire claim. It is better to check now rather than find out after the event.

## How you can help - Donations

Safe Communities Algarve is a non-profit association run by unpaid volunteers. There are no salaried staff. Our services are free of charge to the public and the association is funded by donations. We help many people each year in dealing with the police as well providing a service which is unique in Portugal.

Your generosity by making a donation to help maintain and further develop the work of the association and thereby help keep the Algarve a safe place to live and visit would be appreciated. Any amount helps.

If you would like to make a donation through Paypal please visit our [Welcome page](#) and click on the "donate" button. If you wish to donate by cheque or by interbank transfer please contact SCA for our bank details using the [contact page](#). All donations should be marked "Donation for crime prevention". Thank you.

### Disclaimer

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## How your friends can obtain up to date Crime Prevention advice

Please pass on details of Safe Communities Algarve to neighbours and friends so they to can benefit from the up to date crime prevention advice. Simply ask them to click on the following link to obtain the latest newsletter: [www.safecommunitiesalgarve.com](http://www.safecommunitiesalgarve.com) This is a free service.

**David Thomas**  
**President**  
**Safe Communities Algarve**

*8 March 2018*

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