

Integrated Rural Fire Management – A call to Action!

Resulting from the rural fires of 2017 and the findings of the subsequent reviews, has been the introduction of an integrated and specialized model for the management of rural fires, known appropriately, as the “Integrated Rural Fire Management System”. The aim is to ensure that fire does not pose a threat to the population, nor does it present a potential for harm to people, property and the environment.

This new model strengthens the commitment, collaboration and involvement of all entities whose missions contribute to managing rural fires, such as AGIF, IP, the Institute of Nature Conservation and Forests (ICNF, IP), National Authority for Emergency and Civil Protection (ANEPC), the GNR, the Armed Forces, Fire Departments, and all private agents, including sector companies, forest producers' organizations, owners foresters and citizens.

To carry this forward is the creation of the new Agency for the Integrated Management of Rural Fires (AGIF) headed by Tiago Oliveira. This is a major step forward, as under new legislation it has a coordinating role between various departments involved in the prevention and protection of the population against rural fires.

During the planning stages last year, the AGIF bought in experts from overseas to share their experience in ways to help prevent fires, protection measures, meteorology and its impact on fires as well as firefighting measures, this has helped Portugal a great deal in shaping the way forward. We were able to meet some these.

Work of AGIF

One of the first functions of the AGIF, has been to develop a Campaign entitled “PortugaChama – Call to All”.

This national campaign, which started on 25th January, is intended to inculcate a change in behaviour before summer arrives. Part of this is to create greater awareness of rural fire prevention and protection through television billboards, posters and through the various media.

This, however, is much more than a campaign, it is a call to action, which launches a challenge to everyone to mobilise and contribute to protecting the country from serious rural fires. The danger is there and it is up to us all to act by summer, cleaning the land, taking care of the land and the forest, performing the registering of the land, protecting the villages and alerting people of the risk. We all have a part to play in this.

The themes of the campaign are, valuing the forest, nature, land; caring for the earth and modify behaviour. The Campaign began with videos that can be downloaded from the website of AGIF. www.portugalchama.pt

This new approach integrated approach will hopefully ensure that publicity material is easier to understand material, which is better coordinated between various agencies.

Fuel Management

The general laws concerning fuel management remain the same as 2018. A simplified version can be downloaded in Portuguese from the AGIF website. Detailed information can be downloaded from the Safe Communities website. Land cleaning needs to be completed by the same deadline as last year i.e. 15th March.

The inspection of the cleaning of lands adjacent to buildings (i.e. in a range of 50 meters); and for clusters and industrial areas (in a range of 100 meters) will be carried out between 1st April and 31st May.

A new map of priority areas numbering 1142 parishes has been created. This is more than last year and some areas have changed. It is important to remember however, that cleaning is still required in non-priority areas as well.

A dedicated line for information on matters such as land cleaning and all issues concerning protection measures is **808 200 520**. Use this also for registering to burn debris or contact local Camara or register on-line through www.icnf.pt

Rural Fire Prevention and Protection

Top 10 Action List

1. **Check** if you are living in a high risk fire area
2. **Undertake** land cleaning without delay – if advice is required contact local civil protection or Hotline 808 200 520 – Remember deadline 15th March
3. **Neighbouring land** – if it poses fire risk, and cannot be resolved contact GNR as soon as possible
4. **Prepare** your house by cleaning roof, terraces, leaves from gutters etc
5. **Controlled burning** of debris- Ensure registration, authorisation/permit is obtained before and follow safety regulation
6. **Familiarize** yourself with self-protection measures under Safe village – Safe People Program
7. **For those** in high risk areas – prepare or update an Emergency Evacuation Kit
8. **Emergency Contact numbers** – keep at hand
9. **High risk areas** – Familiarize yourself with village and evacuation plans and assembly points. If none identify and escape route and safety point.
10. **Developments** - Keep up to date through: ICNF, ANPC, IPMA websites and that of SCP

More Information www.portugalchama.pt

Enforcement

From our meetings with the GNR National Headquarters they have emphasised that their strategy is awareness, warnings and as a last resort fines. Enforcement will be based on common sense and much of this will be focus at the priority areas identified.

How you can help

We all need to do our part, by sharing these important messages, reporting overgrown neighbouring land and of course keeping our own land in order. We can all make it happen differently on the ground, in each region, county, parish, and village.

Safe Communities Portugal has an official mandated role, as a conduit, with government to help develop and disseminate information to the international communities in the area of civil protection, as well as reflect your views to them. Please share the safety information from our Facebook page so it reaches the widest audience.

We have a number of Government leaflets concerning Safe Village – Safe People in English and other languages. If you can help in distributing please contact us at info@safecommunitiesportugal.com