

Rural Fire Prevention and Self- protection

Yes it is this time of year again!

So what has changed from last year and what do we need to do to protect our homes from the risk of rural fires?

Last year was a better year, certainly compared with the average of the last years and particularly 2017 and 2018, as there were fewer rural fires and areas burned.

There is little doubt in my mind that people are more aware of the need to reduce the risk of the spread of fires and indeed fires starting in the first place.

More information is available than ever before in multiple languages, plus the increasing fines for the non-compliance of fuel management laws, and an earlier deadline of 15th March last year, prompted people into action.

What has changed since last year?

The answer is in terms of new laws very little. Following the fires of 2017 there was a plethora of new laws - almost impossible to keep up to date with. This year the only main change has been to the list of high risk fire areas. Some have been added and others taken away depending on the conditions in the areas concerned. For example Monchique parish was always on the list, but not last year mainly because a great deal of it burned in 2018. However this year it returns to the list.

The other thing that changed is the weather, particularly in the south where parts of the Algarve are in severe drought conditions. With less rain than usual this winter has meant that vegetation is more susceptible to the spread of fires. This risk will increase as the weather becomes warmer and the dry weather continues.

What should residents now do?

Please see our top 10 Checklist which we advise you cut out and keep handy.

Regarding neighbouring land which is overgrown and in the event of non-compliance, report this to the GNR as soon as possible. All complaints, where verified as a fire risk, are acted up on a priority basis! So do not delay.

Many people clean their land by burning stubble (extensive burns) or by burning heaped and piled debris. As the uncontrolled use of this last year caused over half of the total fires, it is important to register with ICNF (where you can obtain assistance) and secondly if you are doing this yourself follow the important safety measures.

High risk fire areas

These are identified each year as priority parishes for the purposes of monitoring fuel management (Land cleaning). The latest law was passed on 26th February by the Assembly of the Republic reference, Diário da República no. 40/2020, Series II of 2020-02-26.

It identifies around 1200 high priority parishes at risk of rural fires and the timeline for inspections, including 28 parishes in the Algarve.

A change since last year is that there is only one class of priority areas; where before it was classes 1 and 2.

Basically this means that high priority area inspections will commence from 1st April. Those not in high priority areas may also be subject to inspection.

Fuel Management

Most of the general laws concerning fuel management remain the same as 2019.

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 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 your local Camara or register on-line through www.icnf.pt Detailed information can be downloaded from the Safe Communities Portugal website (Civil Protection/Rural fires/Land Cleaning).

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.

Please share the safety information from our Safe Communities Portugal Facebook page so it reaches the widest audience.

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