



760 firefighters prepare for 2017/18 Veld Fire Season.

Firefighters getting ready for Western Cape Veldfire Season

More than 760 firefighters within the province stationed at 28 bases, will undergo a Yellow Card Training (YCT) camp in order to refresh their firefighting skills and test their physical and mental fitness in preparation for the coming fire season. These firefighters have been deployed across the province to reduce the personal and economic harm caused by unwanted veld and forest fires. Within the Western Cape, the Yellow Card Training Camp officially launched

on 26 September 2017 and will continue until 06 October 2017. "The Yellow Card Training is a good opportunity for our firefighters to be refreshed on their firefighting skills to tackle the coming fire season. We are expecting an excellent pass rate from both the Southern and Western sectors. Together with our various stakeholders and partners, we aim to tremendously reduce the risk of fires throughout the province, and ensure that our communities

remain safe from unwanted fires," said WOF Acting General Manager Felicia Ngwasheng. During the 2017 Winter Fire Season, more than 1000 firefighters assisted partners in suppressing 24 fires, limiting the areas burnt to approximately 40 065 hectares. Firefighting aircraft spent 265.2 flying hours (238 of it flown at the devastating fires that swept across the Garden Route in June 2017).

Stack Burns reduces fire risks



Helderberg Team assisting the Cape Peninsula FPA with stack burns.

The Cape Peninsula Fpa (CPFPA) and the Helderberg Team from the Department of Environmental Affairs Working on Fire programme, recently conducted a stack burn surrounding Bezwenie lodge and Casa Maris East ward. As the Western Cape Fires Season approaches the CPFPA says "as the season approaches, landowners are encouraged to create a defensible space around their dwellings and structures. Defensible space aid in the protection of properties and lives against wildfires together with

a save environment to fight and suppress wildfires." Working on Fire manages an Integrated Fire Management (IFM) Programme which includes fire management planning, detection, prevention, suppression, dispatch and coordination and community fire awareness activities. Fire prevention, as part of IFM, is a set of activities developed to mitigate and manage the start and spread of fires as well as navigation of legislation during implementation.

From the devastating Knysna fires to the overpowering Mpumalanga fire season



27-year-old Bonga Bekwa in the thick of things.

27-year-old Bonga Bekwa Type 1 Crew Leader from the Newlands Team in Western Cape was one of the 150 firefighters who were deployed in Mpumalanga, and placed on standby operations as the winter fire season reached its peak. In an interview with WOFire News, Bekwa expressed that it was his first time battling fires in Mpumalanga, just a few months after leading a team on the fire line at the devastating Knysna fires. "The fires here are very different from the Western Cape, as they are

mainly grassland and we are used to steep mountainous fires," said Bekwa. He added that the different fire behaviour did not deter him and his team, "our love for saving lives and protecting the environment made us pull through." Bekwa never expected to be a firefighter. He pursued agricultural studies in the Eastern Cape but could not continue with his studies due to the lack of financial fees. He then moved to Cape Town in 2013 and joined Working on Fire as a firefighter.

Wiseman Mbele is one of the unsung heroes who fought the Knysna Fires.



Wiseman Mbele speaking to firefighters after Knysna fires.

"I'm 23 years of age and a father of two a beautiful son's and a daughter. I was born and raised by my grandmother in the Eastern Cape in a small village called Lady Frere. In 2009 I moved to the Western Cape where I stayed with my parents in Villiersdorp. While growing up I pushed very hard to make sure I made my parents very proud. In 2013, my matric year was very difficult for me as a lot happened in my family that pushed my confidence and motivation down. I pressed through and matriculated in 2013. After school I joined Working on Fire (WOF) in March 2014 at the Kleinmond Base. WOF has thought me a lot of things that I never knew about myself and the firefighting industry. Through my journey in WOF in was selected by my Regional Manager, Shantell Frans, to

complete the Type 2 Crew Leader Course in 2015. It didn't stop there. I then completed the Type 1 Crew Leaders course in 2016. My aim was always to make my RM proud and to be a strong leader for my Team. Outside of work I am a multi-talented person. I am a boxer, Hip Hop Artist & a Vocalist, and most importantly I am a very caring father to his children and aim to be a good example in their lives. WOF has changed my life as it took me out of unemployment and gave me the opportunity to not only learn such a lot about myself and my profession, it gave me the opportunity to support my family. Thank you WOF and the Department of Environmental Affairs for making a difference in my life and alleviating poverty in the lives of many young men and women."

FireSafe workshops teaching communities to understand fire risks



Community members doing risk assessment after workshops.

Following the recent fires which engulfed the Garden Route, the Department of Environmental Affairs' Working on Fire programme conducted several Community FireSafe Workshops in the Knysna Municipality. Western Cape Community Fire Awareness Officer (CFAO) Rayganah Rhoda, conducted several Fire Awareness Presentation and FireSafe Workshops in Karatara; Bongani; Khayaletu; Rheenendal; Nekkies; Wilderness and Conordia. This forms part of a series of fire awareness, door-to-door, and risk reduction campaigns that will take place across the Garden Route. Close to 200 community members attended these workshops over the period of

11 – 15 September 2017. Rhoda says, "FireSafe workshops increase the awareness of fire risks and how communities can mitigate these risks as it is vital to educate communities and children in this regard. The focus of these workshops was on fire management plans, evacuation, risk assessments and the importance of risk reduction. Communities' draw up their Fire Management Plan after doing the Risk Assessment in order for them to now mitigate, remove or reduce the risks identified. A well informed community will ensure a safe and speedy evacuation plan which could result in the minimal loss of lives as well as the safety of everyone."

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