

Newsletter

Greater Stutterheim Fire Protection Association



Kickstarting 2016

Thanks to the incredible efforts made by the Eastern Cape Umbrella Fire Protection Association team, who secured funding for training through the GEF Fynbos Fire Project, the GSFPA has been able to roll out a decent amount of training in a short space of time.

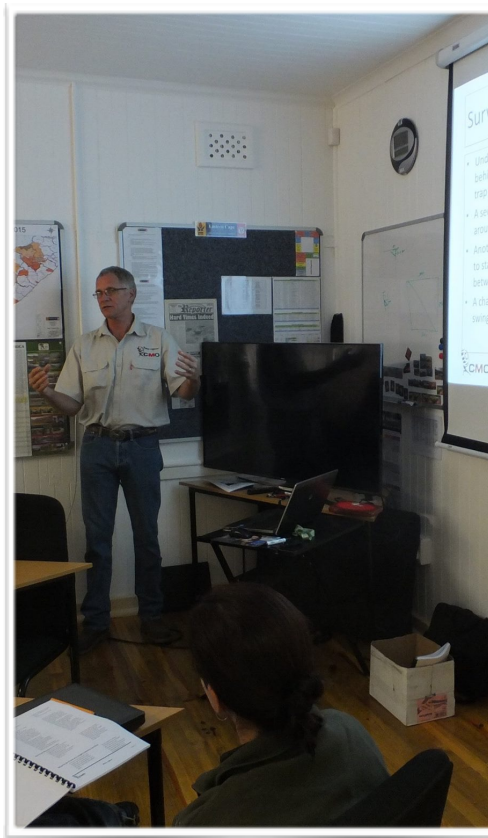
The first Basic Fire Fighter course was sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries who trained 25 individuals from all around the FPA. There after three more GEF sponsored Basic Fire Fighter courses were held in Thomas River, Bolo & Keiskamma Hoek, each training 20 individuals.

But it is not only the farm labour who have learned a new trick or two; along side the Basic Fire Fighter training courses a 3 day Initial Attack Fire Boss course was held in the GSFPA offices which was attended by Foresters, Farmers, FPA Managers, Conservation Managers & Municipal Fire Services. All of them eager to learn more about our common enemy.

Sufficed to say we are hoping that there will be further opportunities such as these & it is our responsibility, as FPA Members, to make the utmost effort to seize them.

On the 8th of March a one day Fire Simulation Course will be held in the GSFPA Offices for landowners to test our readiness & cooperation.

In total 102 individuals have received accredited training excluding the upcoming simulation course & we feel it is safe to say that we have had a steady start to 2016.



Summer Fires

With drought shaking the country to the core, one of many downfalls was a rather serious summer fire season that has not been seen in this area before.

HOW BAD WAS IT?

A total of 12 fires, that we know about, were recorded in the area around Stutterheim. The average size of the fires was more than twice that of the winter fires of 2015. One such a fire started in Cathcart & burned out approximately 1500ha of farm lands.

RAIN

Thankfully, in many areas, the rains have come & although we are not out of the smoke quite yet, we are closer with every drop we receive & ever more grateful.



INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM

Amidst the barrage of seemingly never ending wild fires that plagued California in the 60's & 70's, arose a brilliant system from the US Forest Services for organising & coordinating small & large scale incidents, disasters or even planned events. In September 2001, when tragedy struck the World Trade Center, members of the US Forest Services arrived, offering a system that would be the solution to coordinating the disaster. This system was called the Incident Command System (ICS).



After the success of the implementation of ICS at 9/11 it was standardised as the all-hazard system to be used across all government services. Today nearly every US government services employee holds an ICS qualification. More

than 30 years since its inception it still stands as a tried & tested system & is now used around the world. South Africa first tested the system in 2010 to organise the soccer world cup & in 2015 it was accepted as the national system.

A Once off Opportunity



The Eastern Cape Umbrella FPA has managed to secure 4 ICS courses that will run over 2 weeks at 2 locations. The first location is our very own Hogsback! As an added bonus, instructors from the US will be presenting the courses. Their knowledge & experience in the disaster management arena is unparalleled. There are currently a few open seats left for the course & it will be a disaster in itself if the opportunity is not seized. Should you be interested in attending the course please contact our offices.

Time to Get into Gear

The 2015 fire season, for the most part, received a welcome wet interruption whilst El Nino did a good job of doing the opposite to the summer. With seasons as unpredictable as they are it is easy to either become too relaxed about the winter ahead or alternatively give up completely.

However, the third & better option would be to kick the dust from our shoes & get

ready to face the next challenge.

2015 only served us with 60 fires & as a result it is easy to forget the 217 of the year before or even the devastating fires of the year before that which claimed lives. It is vital that we not fall into the ever so welcoming trap of "taking the hits as they come." Instead, now is as good a time as any to get out the old gloves & take a few

swings at the bag to remind ourselves what it feels like.

Brush off the Bakkie Sakkies; 90% of them didn't have a chance to 'purr' in 2015 & are likely in need of a little love. Burn out that slash pile you were saving for a rainy day; there is no rain in winter & start preparing for the fire break season ahead.



We have all at some or other point said to ourselves at a fire, "That is the last time I get caught unprepared."

Experience is often the best teacher & no experience is quite as effective as a bad one. Let's not give 2016 the opportunity to remind us of the consequences of not taking our own advise.