



Managing smoke from planned burns

Smoke is a problem – how does the PWS manage this?

The ignition of any burn will result in smoke being released into the atmosphere. Smoke from bushfires has been a feature of the Australian environment for thousands of years but in the contemporary environment smoke can impact on people and their activities. Visibility can be significantly decreased if weather conditions are conducive to trapping smoke close to the ground. High concentrations of smoke can cause illness and discomfort to some people and reduce their enjoyment of leisure activities.



The PWS treats seriously its responsibilities to smoke and impacts on communities and works closely with specific industry groups (for example Wine Tasmania) to ensure they are aware of burning intentions. State-of-the-art smoke modelling technology provided by the Bureau of Meteorology determines the likely path and concentration of the smoke plume from the burn.

Impacts on populated areas are avoided if possible, particularly in conditions that would lead to high levels of smoke impacting on communities for more than a few hours. Smoke modelling is a key to determine if a burn will go ahead on a particular day. At times, however, periods of smoke impact are unavoidable if the objective of making communities safer from bushfires is to be achieved.

Who is responsible for managing smoke from planned burns?

The National Environment Protection Measure (NEPM) for Ambient Air Quality has been issued by the National Environment Protection Council. The NEPM sets standards and goals for air quality. The EPA is responsible for implementation of the NEPM in Tasmania including monitoring of air quality.

Fuel reduction burns and agricultural residue burns are currently not subject to bushfire control regulation outside the fire permit period.

What are the new smoke management guidelines?

A coordinated smoke management strategy has been adopted in Tasmania by the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) and forest industry partners working with the Forest Practices Authority (FPA) and the Environment Protection Authority (EPA).

The strategy aims to reduce the negative impacts of smoke on the community by coordinating planned burns to minimise the risk of high concentrations of smoke in individual airsheds and to reduce the risk of smoke pollution within populated centres.

Restrictions are imposed on the number of burns within an area when weather forecasts predict poor smoke dispersal. The EPA may also declare “no burn days”. Improved training and accreditation of personnel involved in the planning and conduct of burns and additional smoke monitoring equipment are also part of the strategy.

Smoke Management Guidelines were introduced on a trial basis in 2008 and the outcomes were reviewed by an independent fire expert. Revised trial guidelines have been put in place since 2009. The guidelines include improved planning for smoke dispersal using data and models developed by the Bureau of Meteorology.

How will the smoke management guidelines be implemented?

The trial guidelines and strategy apply to burns conducted as part of a forest harvesting or regeneration operation and to fuel reduction and ecological management burns conducted by the PWS. The outcomes are monitored and the results will be used to further refine the guidelines and the strategy.

The EPA and FPA are consulting with the Tasmania Fire Service, local government and the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association to encourage the application of the guidelines to all other burns. However, at this stage only forest industry and PWS burns comply with the guidelines.

The FPA is primarily responsible for regulating the planning and conduct of burning activities through conditions placed on forest practice plans. The EPA will continue to be responsible for monitoring smoke emissions and reporting against the NEPM standards. Potential breaches of forest practice plans or legislation will be investigated and serious breaches will be subject to action under the relevant legislation.

What can I do if I have an enquiry or a complaint about smoke management?

All complaints relating to smoke should be lodged with the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) ph 1800 005 171.

Advice on the potential health impacts of smoke exposure can be obtained from the Environmental Health Service Unit, Department of Health and Human Services. A fact sheet about "Smoke from Bushfires and Planned Burning" is available.

Complaints will be collated and used to investigate compliance with the guidelines and strategy.