

ABSTRACT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research study aims at reviewing and assessing the current veldfire management plan that Thaba Chweu Local Municipality (TCLM) Fire Brigade Services utilises in managing the veld fires in its region. It also assists the Fire Brigade Services in compiling an integrated veldfire management plan which combines elements of fire prevention, fire protection, fire suppression and fire recovery. The review and assessment of the plan will, however, assist in identifying and knowing the strength of the veldfire management systems and also propose the necessary improvements that will enhance the effectiveness of the management of veldfires. Thus, a well-developed and appropriate plan should include strategies such as a well-planned firebreak system, a fire protection system, fire fighting safety policies and procedures and a resource management system (including equipment, communications and training of personnel). Adequate and appropriate fire management strategies are imperative to ensure that forest resource together with its ecological and other associated values is protected. The research study emanates from the recent devastating veldfires of 2007 that destroyed 10,000 ha of forest plantation in the Mpumalanga Province.

The purpose of the NVFF Act as amended by the National Fire Laws Amendment Act is to prevent and combat veld, forest and mountain fires throughout South Africa. The Act applies to the open countryside beyond the urban limit and puts in place a range of requirements. The NVFF Act also specifies the responsibilities of land owners. The Act further elaborates that the term '*owners*' includes lessees, people in control of land, the executive body of a community, the manager of State land, and the Chief Executive Officer of any local authority. Farmers continue to use fire in veld and forest land to manage grazing and habitats and as a measure to help prevent uncontrolled fires. One of the research objectives is to ensure that the integrated veldfire management plan complies with the legal requirement of the NVFF Act and explores the ecological condition that may cause veldfire in the region.

The Act further makes provision for the establishment of Fire Protection Association (FPA), which is designed to lay down minimum standards to be maintained by members in relation to all aspects of veldfire prevention and readiness for fire fighting and to regulate controlled burning to

conserve ecosystems and reduce fire danger. The Theoretical frameworks of different authors from local and international perspectives were consulted to gain more knowledge that will assist in improving and upgrading the current veldfire management plan.

The findings of the research show that TCLM Fire Brigade Services have the fire prevention, fire preparedness, fire protection and suppression measures in place and there has been a decline of veldfire incidents since the TCLM implemented the prevention programme which involved community participation. Hence, the Fire Brigade Services does have a veldfire management plan that is used in addressing veldfires which is not approved by the municipal council. Therefore there is a need, therefore, to have an integrated veldfire management plan that is composed of all the prevention measures and approved by the municipal council.

The importance of the research will contribute to organisational learning within all agencies involved in the management of veldfires in the district and the Mpumalanga province as a whole. The research will further focus on improved service delivery and enhanced capacity among agencies and members of local communities to understand, prepare for, prevent and respond to veldfires. In addition, the findings should, wherever appropriate, relate to the disaster management policy for South Africa, while taking account of current policies and institutions. A well developed plan cannot only directly save lives but also serve to reduce loss of property and disruption of social networks.

The results show that Thaba Chweu Local Municipality conducts most of its fire awareness campaigns at community, primary and high schools. FAO (2006) spells out that a well- informed public will be more likely to use fire carefully and adhere to policy and legal boundaries and thus assist in the prevention, detection and reporting of veldfires.

In conclusion, cooperation and coordination is the key to veldfire management and prevention strategies because of the authority given to local government by the Act. The research document will assist the municipality on upgrading the current existing veldfire management plan in order to proactively deal with the veld and forest fires within its vicinity. Compliance to the current veld and forest Act and other relative legislative frameworks on fire control and management v

must be effectively enforced to promote the use of prescribed burning and minimise breakaway fires. The research document also explores the theoretical framework of the management of veldfires as well as the legislative requirements of the given discussions.

The research document will further demonstrate the author's commitment to assist in reducing disaster risks posed by veldfires. Successful implementation of the plan will require concerted efforts from all stakeholders within the district. The veldfire management plan recognises the importance of cross-border collaboration and provides framework collaboration with the municipal's neighbours. If put to good use, the contingency plan will strengthen capacities at all levels to mount a timely and coordinated management and control to veldfire outbreaks in the district and the province.