

Firebreak Policy

This factsheet sets out Fire and Emergency New Zealand's approach to our legislative power to apply firebreaks to help protect communities and property from the threat of wildfire under the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act 2017 (the Act).

Firebreak definition

A firebreak is defined in section 6 of the Act as "a natural or an artificial physical barrier against the spread of fire from or into any area of continuous flammable material".

What firebreaks are used for

As a risk reduction tool, a firebreak can provide a window of opportunity for suppression and evacuation. It also provides time for Fire and Emergency to deploy its resources to stop/reduce the speed and spread of wildfire and to undertake other firefighting strategies.

Impact of the Firebreak Policy on the local Fire and Emergency Fire Plan

Section 10 of the Fire Plans will need to be updated to include reference to the new Firebreak Policy.

Notification to Fire and Emergency of the potential need for a firebreak

Potential firebreaks will be brought to Fire and Emergency in a range of ways.

- A concern raised by a member of the public or community group
- A Landholder asking for advice
- Fire and Emergency staff identifying an issue.

Fire and Emergency assessment of the issue

When notified, a Fire and Emergency Assessor will attempt to contact the Landholder to arrange an onsite assessment of the issue in question.

The Assessor will gather information for the assessment that includes:

- Asset type
- Asset hazard
- Natural land features and topography
- Fuel types and their associated risks
- Potential ignition sources

- Risk reduction and mitigation tools already in use
- Response capability if a wildfire were to occur
- Any competing local and national regulations
- Photos to clearly depict the information gathered where applicable

Likelihood and Consequence ratings are then assessed.

Likelihood rating

Assesses the probability of an ignition occurring by looking at the most likely sources or activities that may either create heat and/or sparks or an unwanted ignition.

Consequence rating

The following factors are considered for the Consequence rating if a potential ignition were to occur:

- Evacuation opportunity of the public
- Potential level of environmental, cultural, biodiversity and historic damage or loss
- Potential level of property, social or economic loss

Risk assessment score

The Likelihood and Consequences ratings are then used to generate an overall Risk Score determining if a mitigation is required.

Risk score determination

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 1-5 | A mitigation may not be necessary as the risk is low. |
| 6-10 | A mitigation may be necessary as the risk is moderate. |
| 12-16 | A mitigation is recommended as the risk is high. |
| 20-25 | A mitigation must be taken immediately as the risk is extreme. |

The score must be justified and align with the Assessor's experience and expertise.

Firebreak practicality and effectiveness

A series of practical and scientific tests will be undertaken to determine the potential fire behaviour of the area, what construction of firebreak would reduce the risk and if it would be practical to implement.

Final outcome of the assessment

If a firebreak is recommended/mandated, the final outcome of the assessment will detail:

- Type of firebreak
- Width and location of the firebreak
- How the firebreak reduces the potential risk
- Whether or not the Landholder agrees with the outcome
- Maintenance and implementation considerations.

Both the Assessor and Landholder should sign the assessment form to show the onsite assessment was completed. This signature is not an agreement of the outcome, just denotes that the Landholder was present during the assessment.

Fire and Emergency review and approval of the assessment and proposed outcome

- The assessment and associated outcome must be reviewed by a member of the National Wildfire team.
- Following completion of the review, the outcome must be signed off by the District Manager.

Firebreak decision

Firebreak deemed necessary

If a firebreak is deemed necessary, under section 62 of the Act, Fire and Emergency can require a Landholder to:

- (a) Make and clear any firebreak on the Landholder's land
- (b) Remove from any firebreak any vegetation or other thing.

If so, Fire and Emergency will prepare documents as follows:

- A Firebreak Engagement Outcome letter, provided to the Notifier and the Landholder
- A Firebreak Issue letter, provided to the Landholder
- And may issue a Firebreak Notice

Firebreak deemed not necessary

If a firebreak is deemed not necessary following the assessment, the Landholder and Notifier will receive a Firebreak Engagement Outcome letter only.

Installation and maintenance costs of a firebreak

The installation and maintenance costs of a firebreak are the responsibility of the Landholder.

Disputes process

If the Landholder doesn't agree with the Firebreak Notice, the Landholder can file a dispute through the [Fire and Emergency Dispute Resolution Scheme](#) managed by the Independent Complaint and Review Authority or phone:

Phone: **+64 9 486 7140**

Freephone: **0508 ICRA REVIEW (0508 427 273)**

Contact

For more information about firebreaks, or to notify Fire and Emergency of a potential issue, email: wildfire@fireandemergency.nz.

