



WOFIRE NEWS

SAVING LIVES • PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT • RESTORING DIGNITY

CLEANING OUR WETLANDS

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SA CRICKET HONOURS FIREFIGHTERS

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FIREFIGHTER JOINS SA POLICE SERVICES

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Invasive species still a burning issue

Alien plants continue to turn up the heat

Edna Molewa, Minister of Environmental Affairs

As the Western Cape continued to experience several fires during January and February this year, questions were again being asked about the role that invasive plant species played in fuelling these fires.

It may be too early for an analysis of the economic cost of the January 2017 fires in the south-western Cape, but it is clear the amounts run into millions of rands.

The Somerset West (Helderberg) fires in January alone were reported to have caused R60 million damage, excluding the costs of fighting the fires.

Past experience has shown that a number of variables such as wind and high temperatures fuel these major fires. The presence of alien invasive plant species also plays a role and worsens the damage caused by high winds and dry conditions.

In January 2000, wildfires raged across the southern and central parts of the Table Mountain chain. Back then, coordination of firefighting efforts was haphazard, capacity was limited and chaos reigned. Eighty structures burned down in those fires.

There was a common denominator to the eighty structures that were burned. Every single one of them had invasive alien plants around them.

These invasive plants – the various wattles, pines, hakea, myrtle, gum and other species –



Minister Edna Molewa

burn at a far greater intensity than the indigenous plants they displace, as much as tenfold or more the intensity. And that makes fires involving them so much more difficult to fight.

One of the major impacts of invasive plants is that they consume far more water than the indigenous plants they displace, which is also a factor in wildfire management.



Fire is a natural component of the fynbos. It needs fires – but it needs them at the right time and intensity. If there are invasive plants in areas where fire burns, the intensity invariably kills the indigenous seeds and favours the germination of the seeds of the invasive plants.

In the wake of the fires of 2000, the Ukuvuka Campaign was initiated, led by the Department

of Environmental Affairs in partnership with SANParks, the City of Cape Town, the Province, volunteers and landowners.

This later gave way to the Working on Fire programme, to establish a capacity to manage wildfires. Incident Command Centres were established to ensure optimal coordination of efforts to fight wildfires. *Continues on page 2*

World Wetlands Day

Environmentalists around the world marked World Wetlands Day on 2 February with this year's theme being 'Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction'. Government departments, non-governmental organisations and civil society came together on the day to raise public awareness of the value of wetlands and their link to disaster risk reduction. Working on Fire participated in various events throughout the country to show support for the campaign and to raise awareness of the importance of protecting our wetlands.

Read further on page 3 to learn how WOF partnered with various institutions to commemorate World Wetlands Day and raise awareness of how fire impacts on wetlands.



World Wetlands Day
2 February 2017

Wetlands for our Future
Sustainable Livelihoods



on 2 February 2017

Editorial

Dear Readers

Welcome to the February edition of the WOFire Newsletter. In this edition you can read about how Working on Fire contributed to the celebrations held across the country commemorating World Wetlands Day on 2 February.

We report on how our various teams are preparing themselves, landowners and communities for the upcoming fire seasons.

As usual we also feature good news stories about how Working on Fire is significantly changing the lives of its participants, with some participants bidding farewell to Working on Fire to take up positions in the South African Police Service. These participants talk about how the skills they gained while in the programme contributed to changing their lives through further education or getting new jobs.

Keep in the know with Working on Fire and its participants' activities by following us on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Happy reading!

MD Message

Llewellyn Pillay



February has been a busy month for our participants as they continue to battle multiple fires in the Western Cape. Our thoughts are with them. I want to urge all participants wherever you are in the workplace, on the fire line or doing community-related activities to continue to be vigilant and to maintain a high regard for your safety and that of your fellow colleagues.

This month we supported the Department of Environmental Affairs' Wetlands Month Campaign. I thank all the provinces who participated in these activities and who assisted to remind us of the need to protect our wetlands.

On 9 February, during his State of the Nation Address, President Jacob Zuma mentioned the significant contribution made by the Department of Environmental Affairs-funded Expanded Public Works Programme Working on Fire in fighting unemployment. Early this year Working on Fire recruited unemployed youth from disadvantaged areas to be trained as firefighters, while some of our participants used the skills they gained while in the programme to find new jobs in the private and government sectors.

We wish them all the best in their endeavours.

Introduction of Editorial Team

Editor-in-chief

Linton Rensburg
Cell: 082 508 0990
Email: linton.rensburg@wofire.co.za
National Communications Manager

Deputy Editor

Olwethu Mpeshe
Cell: 073 847 3291
Email: olwethu.mpeshe@wofire.co.za
Communications Coordinator

Parapara Makgahlela
Cell: 073 871 9350
Email: parapara.makgahlela@wofire.co.za
Province: Gauteng

Matema Gwangwa
Cell: 073 732 1344 • Fax: 086 569 7419
Email: matema.gwangwa@wofire.co.za
Province: Limpopo

Nthabiseng Mokone
Cell: 073 831 5936
Email: nthabiseng.mokone@wofire.co.za
Province: Eastern Cape

Nompilo Zondi
Cell: 073 775 6465 / 082 570 1572
Email: nompilo.zondi@wofire.co.za
Province: KwaZulu-Natal

Patricia Maanelo
Cell: 079 035 5732 • Tel: +27 18 290 8512
Email: patricia.maanelo@wofire.co.za
Province: North West

Lauren Howard
Cell: 071 115 5843 • Tel: 021 761 1992
Email: lauren.howard@wofire.co.za
Province: Western Cape

Wayne Mokhethi
Cell: 073 894 7689
Email: wayne.mokhethi@wofire.co.za
Province: Free State

Lebogang Maseko
Cell: 062 365 9978
Email: lebogang.maseko@wofire.co.za
Province: Mpumalanga

WOF TV Unit

Christalene de Kella
Lead Video Journalist
Cell: 082 767 7489 • Fax: 086 519 7554
Email: christalene.dekella@wofire.co.za

Rethabile Selepe
Video Journalist
Cell - 072 722 3149
Email - rethabile.selepe@wofire.co.za

Kylle Benjamin
Video Editor
kylle.benjamin@wofire.co.za

General contacts for WOFIRE NEWS

Tel: +27 21 418 2569 • Cell: +27 82 508 0990 • Email: news@wofire.co.za

Working on Fire is on Social Media | [facebook](#)

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Working on Fire is an Expanded Public Works Programme which resides within the Department of Environmental Affairs.



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Aerial support was also developed and hundreds of firefighters went through rigorous selection and training programmes.

By the time wildfires swept through the area in March 2015, coordination through the Incident Command Centres was well developed. The hundreds of trained firefighters of Working on Fire, as well as from the City, SANParks, the Province, the Fire Protection Associations, the volunteers and others, enabled a professional response. The aerial support, through the Working on Fire helicopters and fixed-wing water bombers, made a pivotal difference.

Government spends about R80 million per year in the Western Cape on implementing integrated fire management services through the Working on Fire programme.

As much as we had cause to celebrate the excellence of the firefighting response, it would have been a vastly different situation had it not been for the work of the Working for Water programme.

Through Working for Water, government has invested billions of rands in controlling invasive species in the country, and over a billion rands of that has been spent in the Western Cape.

Because of this programme, containing the fires has been rendered easier. The education of landowners and homeowners meant that more properties and houses were fireproofed.

In the intervening years between the January 2000 fires and the next major fires along the Table Mountain chain in March 2015, Working for Water and its partners cleared over 6,000 hectares of invasive alien plants.

Regrettably however, lessons from the previous fires have still not resonated with some landowners. More specifically, many landowners appear not to be familiar with



Firefighters battle blaze in Paarl, Western Cape on Tuesday. (Image courtesy of Sullivan Photography)

the provisions of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act of 1998 and the penalties it prescribes.

If you have the types of invasive species that are 'born to burn' on your land, and a fire spreads from these plants onto other land, causing damage, you can be held liable.

Given the role of invasive species in wildfires the Department's Alien and Invasive Species Regulations of 2015 have exceptional relevance.

Following the March 2015 fires in the south-western Cape, our Biosecurity Directorate undertook an advocacy programme for all landowners abutting the Table Mountain National Park.

This was followed up by pamphlets on fireproofing houses (and particularly the risk of invasive species) being hand-delivered by the Table Mountain Volunteer Wildfire Services. Pre-notices were then issued to larger landowners where alien and invasive species on their land posed a particular risk.

Our premium news products, WOFire News and WOF TV, have the single objective of being informative!

They are there to keep our participants informed about what's happening in WOF across the country.

WOF TV News and WoFire News are dedicated to the hard work of our participants and aim to focus on their stories, not only in relation to their work in WOF but also how they have grown and developed in the Programme.

Furthermore we feature many stories of participants who took responsibility for their own lives and also extended their compassion to others.

Readers are welcome to send us their stories in their home language and we will assist with translation and editing.

Email your story to news@wofire.co.za or submit them via your local Provincial Communication Officers, Regional Managers, Base Managers or Crew Leaders.

Working on Fire celebrating World Wetlands Day

KwaZulu-Natal HAT and learners take a close look at wetlands

World Wetlands Day is celebrated on 2 February every year. Working on Fire in KwaZulu-Natal, in partnership with the Department of Environmental Affairs, Umgeni Water and ILembe District Municipality, visited four schools near wetlands to teach learners about the benefits of wetlands and why they must be protected.

Fire Awareness Training Officer, Bongumusa Nyathi, says, "We taught learners the benefits of protecting wetlands, as they help with flood damage control and slowly release underground stored water which can provide water during drought if managed properly." Crew members of the eThekweni High Altitude Team helped

learners to identify alien plants in the wetlands and the risks they pose to indigenous plants. They also explained the role alien plants have in the spread of wildfires, as they intensify fires making it difficult for firefighters to suppress these fires.

Schools were encouraged to adopt wetlands near them in support of the 2017 theme 'Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction.' "Wetlands can only help the community if they are well kept and protected from unsupervised fires," says Nyathi.

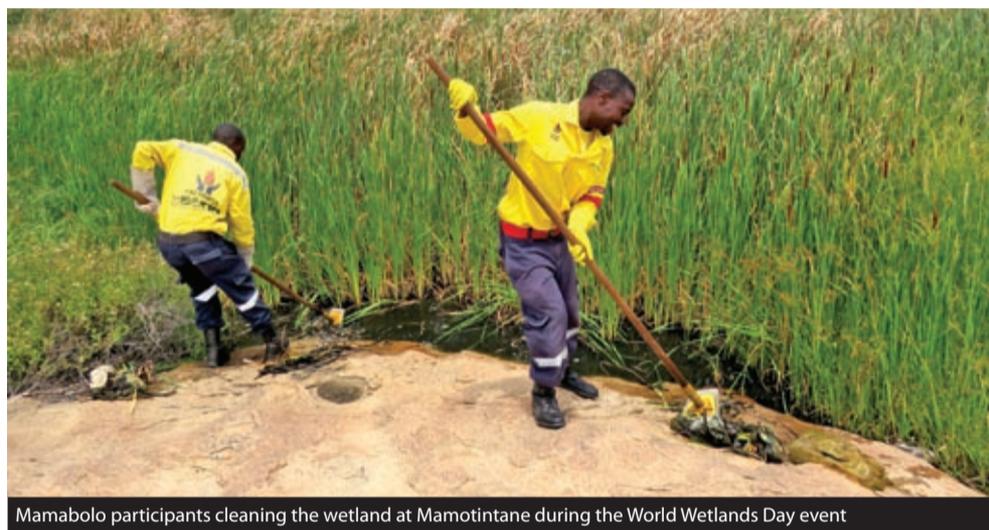


Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal



HAT members showed learners alien invasive plants found in wetlands

Limpopo clean-up wetlands



Mamabolo participants cleaning the wetland at Mamotintane during the World Wetlands Day event

The month of February was declared by the United Nations to be a month dedicated to protecting wetlands through education and awareness campaigns. The second day of February became World Wetlands Day, the idea being to promote conservation, and the wise and sustainable utilisation of wetlands.

As Section 24 of our Bill of Rights states that everyone has the right to a healthy environment and the right to have the environment protected, WOF saw it as beneficial to participate in this worthy campaign. Along with various stakeholders WOF has been educating the community members of Mamotintane about the impacts of wetlands.

WOF participants started the day by cleaning two wetlands to do their part to protect the environment.

"We are proud to be part of this campaign and what we did today was not only about cleaning the wetland. We protected our environment and saved lives doing so," says

Mapula Letsoalo, the Base Communications Representative at Mamabolo Base.

In previous years, these wetlands used to serve as the water resources for people and livestock but as transformation and upliftment of society continued, these wetlands were neglected. Wetlands have been turned into dumping sites and pose a serious health hazard to people.

"Wetlands are important because they are a natural purification system and also decrease the effects of floods as they absorb water and release it gradually over a certain period," says MP Tsheola, Limpopo's Deputy Director of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism.

Wetlands also help with fires by providing water resources to extinguish fires.



Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo

Injaka Teams puts spotlight on wetlands

The Injaka Team in Mpumalanga collaborated with the provincial Departments of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs and Basic Education, as well as the South African National Parks and Bushbuckridge Local Municipality to celebrate World Wetlands Day (WWD).

The day featured environmental education presentations for community members and learners aimed at raising awareness of the importance of looking after wetlands in communities.

MEC for Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs, Vusumuzi Shongwe, said, "Healthy wetlands play an important role as they help reduce the

impacts of extreme weather conditions such as floods, drought and cyclones on communities."

Mahlatshe Mashego from the Injaka team said, "As firefighters, we often depend on wetlands as a source of water supply when we have to fight fires."

He advised community members to take care of wetlands and not to pollute them. The 2017 WWD was themed 'Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction' to highlight the impact of natural disasters on natural ecosystems.



Lebogang Maseko, Provincial Communication Officer, Mpumalanga



The Community Fire Awareness Training Officer welcomes MEC Vusumuzi Shongwe at the WOF exhibition stand

WOF educate learners and communities about wetlands

The Department of Environmental Affairs' Working on Fire programme in the Eastern Cape, in partnership with the Department of Economics Affairs, Environment and Tourism, the provincial education department, SANBI, DAFF, SANParks and iNgduza Hill Municipality, celebrated World Wetlands Day at Mbono Junior Secondary School on 2 February 2017.

The purpose of the day was to educate learners and community members about the importance of wetlands, the impact they have on the communities and their role in disaster risk reduction.

More than 500 learners from 14 schools who were part of this celebration were taken to a nearby wetland to be educated on the importance of wetlands.

Environmental Officer, Luyolo Sheyi, told learners that mangroves, coral reefs, inland



deltas, peatlands, rivers and floodplains help us cope with extreme weather conditions.

He also taught those in attendance how to identify wetlands and urged communities to not build on wetlands.

"Wetlands are able to reduce the severity of drought and floods by regulating stream flow," Sheyi said.

He said that wetlands should not be destroyed or turned into dumping sites as they provide drinking water to poor rural communities.

Noludwe Zali, a Type 1 Crew Leader for Mkhambathi Team, said wetlands needed to be protected from fires as "Fire can lead to loss of seeds due to the wrong timing of the fire."



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape

Communities taught to be FireSafe



Daku Communities taught how to be fire safe

The Department of Environmental Affairs' Working on Fire programme continued to show its commitment to protecting the environment and saving lives to combat veld and forest fires in the Eastern Cape.

In an effort to curb the escalating number of fires in the province, Community Fire Awareness Officer, Wongama Copiso, started conducting FireSafe workshops in communities around the province.

Copiso empowered more than 100 community members from Daku and New Brighton in Port Elizabeth to be fire safe.

"We are trying to reduce the numbers of fires in the province by giving FireSafe workshops in communities so that they are able to prevent fires and know what to do in case of fires," Copiso says. He says that the workshops also enable community members to identify the risks of fires and mitigate them.

"People must make sure they remove fuel near their houses to prevent fires in their houses," he warns.

Copiso also says that the WOF Fire Awareness Department will be utilising local radio stations to pass the fire safety message to as many people as possible and works closely with stakeholders across the province to lessen fire risks on their property or land.

One of the community members, Xolani Mava, says that the workshops will assist communities when it comes to fire prevention.

Mava says that they will start making firebreaks in their respective areas to prevent fires from spreading to their homes.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape

WOF partners with stakeholders to raise fire awareness

Working on Fire was recently part of an Integrated Fire Awareness event that took place in Ngudwini, Ward 5, in the uMlalazi Local Municipality. WOF was part of a task team determined to reduce the number of fires that break out in communities, which included FireWise, SAPPI, the Provincial Disaster Management Centre, King Cetshwayo District Disaster Management Centre and traditional leaders.

KZN Community Fire Awareness Officer, Makhosi Dladla says, "WOF aimed to encourage community members to empower themselves by requesting assistance in reducing the risk of fires from the various organisations present at

the event." The Mayor of uMlalazi Municipality, Councillor Thelumoya Zulu, told the gathering that, as much as there were many disasters in his municipality, wildfires remain the greatest danger, which was why it was so important to educate as many communities as possible.

Since the beginning of this year, WOF has conducted seven FireSafe workshops with communities in the province. "Early preparation is the key to reaching as many communities at risk of fire as possible," says Dladla.



Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal



WOF participants together with stakeholders at the event

Saving lives through community fire awareness



As the Western Cape fire season continues, Community Fire Awareness Officer Rayganah Rhoda, together with Stellenbosch Disaster Risk Management, conducted four FireSafe workshops in Stellenbosch to ensure that the community remains free from unwanted fires.

Members from the Cloetesville, Langrug, Groendal and White City communities attended the workshops. These communities reside in high fire risk areas where there is a huge fuel load.

Rhoda says, "Communities were taught to draw up Fire Management Plans based on their risk assessments. This enables them to evacuate safely and identify suitable assembly points in the event of a fire." We urge communities to be vigilant during this fire season and not start unnecessary fires, particularly on dry days. People are also asked to remove rubble on their properties which can pose a serious fire risk and houses next to grasslands need to ensure that there are sufficient firebreaks between their properties and these grasslands.

Rhoda says they also asked residents to cut down overhanging tree branches close to their properties and to clean their gutters as the leaves in the gutters also pose a fire risk. Residents must ensure that they have the contact details of local fire authorities at hand should there be a fire emergency.

The fire emergency contact number is 112.



Lauren Howard, Provincial Communication Officer, Western Cape

Assisting landowners to comply with Veld and Forest Fire Act

Working on Fire participants across Limpopo started the year full of passion and energy. As the leading programme in Integrated Fire Management Services, WOF's participants have been engaging with various landowners to assist them to comply with the National Veld and Forest Fire Act (NVFFA).

Participants from all five regions are working hard creating firebreaks, doing block burns, slashing and cutting trees. "Our teams have started with preparations for the upcoming fire season because with the climate change, you never know when the first fires will strike," says Katlego Thipe, the Base Communications



Nebo participants doing slashing at Matlala Hospital

Representative at Nebo Base. Even though there was a reduction in veld fires in Limpopo last year, WOF participants will not let their guard down in terms of preparedness. Participants are also running fire awareness campaigns at local schools, educating the learners about the impact of fires on the environment and society. All these school awareness campaigns are aligned with the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS).



Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo

Highveld Team urges community to reduce fire risks

The North West Highveld Team conducted a community fire awareness workshop at Matlwang Community Hall with caregivers from the Department of Health.

The main aim of the workshop was to make the community aware of fire risks and prepare them for the upcoming winter fire season so that they would be able to protect themselves and their homes against unwanted fires. The community members were encouraged to avoid dumping waste in wetlands as this affects the environment negatively and can cause fires.

One of the participants from Highveld Base, Meshack Roman, says the Matlwang community is among the communities that are at risk of fires and experience many unwanted fires during the fire season, which may result in loss of lives and property.

Joseph Mokete, one of the community members who attended the event says, "I am impressed with the information we received from the very well-informed firefighters and we hope they will come again in the near future should there be more topics. We will appreciate what they share with us."

The team plans to conduct as many community and school awareness events as



Highveld participants conducting a community fire awareness workshop

possible before the arrival of the upcoming winter season as this might reduce the number of fires occurring.



Patricia Maanelo, Provincial Communication Officer, North West

HAT participants get first aid and safety training

Participants from the High Altitude Teams in the Eastern Cape underwent a five-day First Aid and safety training exercise from 6 February.

During the training participants were taught how to deal with health and safety emergencies in the workplace.

Working on Fire invited Alderson Mtec to come and train participants in skills that will assist them to safely handle emergencies in the workplace.

"We are training the participants in the theory of First Aid and safety and also provide practicals for both to ensure they are able to help with minor injuries," Vuyokazi Mestile of Alderson Mtec explains.

Mestile says that the training emphasised the proper management of the scene of an accident to prevent further injuries.

"We give employees unique medical emergency training based on where they work," she says.

One of the participants who attended the training, Lonwabo Ngele, says that the training will assist them in their day-to-day duties as their work can be dangerous at times.

"We work on mountainous and steep areas while removing alien vegetation and accidents can happen," he says.

Ngele says that before the training, they didn't know how to handle or assist injured personnel while waiting for the ambulance, but now they will be able to give First Aid assistance when needed.



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape



Free State teams focus on readiness and recruitment

The Working on Fire Free State teams started off this year with a bang with the teams preparing themselves physically and mentally for the year ahead. Teams all over the province are preparing themselves thoroughly for what is expected to be a tough year ahead with the annual Yellow Card Training Camp not too far away. The intense Yellow Card Training Camp is held in the first half of April in preparation for the winter fire season.

During these Training Camps the firefighters are equipped with the right personal protective clothing and equipment and they also have to undergo fitness training (2.4km run, push-ups, pull-ups and sit-ups) and advanced firefighting training. Upon finishing the training firefighters are issued with Yellow Cards which indicate that they are ready to fight fires.

WOF, which falls under the Department of Environmental Affairs and is implemented through the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP), has already conducted extensive recruitment in different cities across the province.

Since the commencement of 2017, WOF has recruited 22 unemployed young men and women from Bethlehem, Clarens, Rouxville, Dewetsdorp, Vrede, Memel and Warden. These new recruits will be sent for training to the WOF Training Academy, where they will receive training for 25 days in Basic and Advanced Firefighting, First Aid and Integrated Fire Management.

Teams prepare themselves by doing numerous fitness exercises, as when they are out on the fire line battling relentless flames and extreme heat, their physical capabilities are severely challenged.



WOF's Vrede Team assisting in the recruitment process

"Since we have come back from holiday we have been doing fitness to prepare ourselves in case we get called to the Western Cape to assist with the fires that are burning there. However, we are aware that the assessments that will be taking place at the training camp are also not far away and we want the entire team to pass with flying colours," says Monde Ntobela, a WOF Bloemfontein Base crew leader.

Most of the Working on Fire teams in the Free State have commenced with their fitness and team readiness activities such as cleaning of tools and equipment as well as cleaning and organising the bases so that they are prepared to be called out at any moment to attend to fires.



Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

KwaZulu-Natal gears up for 2017

Working on Fire KwaZulu-Natal is geared up and ready to face 2017. Teams across the province are participating in various activities in preparation for the 2017 winter fire season. The saying 'the early bird catches the worm' seems to be the motto in KZN, as teams started their fitness exercises after returning from the festive holidays.

Teams are doing fitness training such as the 2.4km run, sit-ups, push-ups and pull-ups to ensure they are physically fit and can endure extreme conditions on the fireline. The Fire Awareness Department has also started conducting FireSafe workshops with communities and Community Development Workers. Some firefighters have gone for training and refresher training at the Training Academy. Fuel load reductions and top-up



recruitment will also be taking place at base level and plans are in place for the start of the fire season.

Community Fire Awareness Officer Makhosi Dladla says, "The sooner we start the better. Our winter fire season kicks off in June and sometimes as early as April in some regions. By starting early with fire awareness, we maximise our target audience and warn as many people as possible to be vigilant for the upcoming fire season."

She says the earlier preparations begin, the more mentally and physically ready teams will be for any incident that may arise.



Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal

Limpopo participants ready to tackle 2017 fires

The Department of Environmental Affairs' Working on Fire (WOF) Programme has opened its doors in Limpopo after a well-deserved rest.

Thirty-one WOF teams from across Limpopo resumed their duties at their respective bases. The participants have already started preparing for the upcoming winter fire season. Fitness has taken priority among these fire warriors to get their bodies and minds into shape.

Apart from the fitness activities, the WOF participants started with plans to roll out integrated fire management systems to landowners, schools and communities. It is never too early to start preparing for the winter fire season. During the festive holidays, the province received more rain

which will impact on the density of fuel loads in most areas. Some of our teams have already started assisting various stakeholders and farmers with manual fuel load reduction and creating firebreaks.

We will also be engaging schools with our fire awareness campaigns that are aligned with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) curriculum.

More than 600 firefighters from WOF in Limpopo are on alert to respond to veld fires that may occur while two teams are on standby to be deployed to the Western Cape should there be a need for assistance.



Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo



Proteas honour Cape fire heroes

Cricket South Africa honoured firefighters from Working on Fire and the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Services at the fourth Momentum One Day International cricket match between South Africa and Sri Lanka, which took place at the Newlands Cricket Stadium.

WOF firefighters from the Newlands Team had the privilege of marching onto the cricket pitch as well as forming a guard of honour for the South African and Sri Lanka cricketers. The firefighters were seen as true heroes as Protea players shook their hands before the match started.

Following the recent spate of veld fires, Cricket South Africa decided to celebrate the firefighters' resilience and commitment to protecting the environment as well as the Cape fynbos biome, home to the national flower, the Protea. We thank the 1 000 firefighters for committing themselves to saving lives and protecting the environment.



Working on Fire and the City of Cape Town firefighters prepare to march onto the cricket field

 Lauren Howard, Provincial Communication Officer, Western Cape

More workshops for early childhood development teachers



A trend is on the rise for Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDs) requesting Working on Fire fire safety workshops in Gauteng, according to Gauteng's Fire Awareness Training Officer, Jabulile Shabalala.

"The ECD principals are constantly requesting the fire safety workshops from the WOF fire awareness team," she says.

Shabalala says that it is their duty to save lives through educating people about fire safety, and notes that ECDs are expected to comply with government's occupational health and safety standards.

"No one is there to offer them training. We are here to save lives of people," she says. Shabalala says that fire safety content is perfectly

tailored to meet the needs and demands of the centres. Educators are mostly concerned with the fire safety procedures they need to follow in the event of fire, as they need to know how they can protect themselves from fire accidents and also educate children at the centres. She ensures educators are aware of the evacuation process, assembly points and overall safety of the centres. After all, educators are entrusted with the safety of the children in their care.

"We offer them a professional service for free," she adds.

 Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng

Free State Fire Awareness winners



With fire awareness being one of the top priorities within the Working on Fire programme, teams in the Free State have been going out weekly to educate communities about fires. As an incentive, teams receive monetary rewards as prizes for conducting the most activities.

The three top-performing teams in the Free State in terms of the fire awareness activities conducted were Heilbron with 25 activities, followed by Rouxville with 20 activities, and the Harrismith and Warden Teams who shared third position with 11 activities each.

"I am proud of our teams in terms of conducting fire awareness in our communities and schools. I wish to congratulate all the teams and also encourage other teams to go out in numbers to equip our people with information on how to minimise fire risks," says Tommy Mokoena, Fire Awareness Training Officer.

"We managed to get position one even though it was tough. Sometimes we had to go out to communities and schools for awareness presentations even when it rained. However, our team spirit helps a lot and I am proud of what we have achieved," says Tshokolo Moroeng, the Heilbron Base Communications Representative.

 Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

Quality assured workshops ensure effective results

Fire Awareness Officers, participants and the Community Fire Awareness Officers are regularly assessed to ensure that Working on Fire produces high-quality fire awareness presentations and workshops. This month the KwaZulu-Natal Fire Awareness Department was assessed by the Fire Awareness National Coordinator to make sure WOF standards for fire awareness presentations and workshops are being maintained.

"Quality assuring what we do is important in fire awareness. We thus conduct periodic assessments of the fire awareness training officers and teams, checking adherence to standards of delivery to ensure that we deliver quality fire awareness and workshops in schools and communities," says National Fire

Awareness Training Coordinator, Doreen Makoni. Assessment guidelines for a Community Fire Awareness Officer (CFAO) includes how topics are introduced to the audience, facilitation skills, presentation skills, voice projection, body language, and how practical risk assessment exercises or group discussions are introduced and supervised by the Community Fire Awareness Officer.

"Prior to conducting workshops, the CFAO must profile a community in order to understand the culture, traditional beliefs and politics of the identified community and know their challenges," says Makoni.

 Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal



The Fire Awareness Training Officer and National Fire Awareness Training Officer addressing participants

Free State teams battle Western Cape fires



The WOF Thaba Nchu Team that assisted WOF Western Cape teams during the December period

During December and January 225 firefighters from Working on Fire teams in the Free State were deployed in the Western Cape. In December, the Thaba Nchu, Theunissen, Bloemfontein and Winburg Teams, a combined Harrismith and Bethlehem Team and a combined Brandfort and Welkom Team were deployed.

During January the Ficksburg, Marquard and a combined Rouxville and Dewetsdorp Teams were deployed to assist the teams in the Western Cape in combatting the destructive fires that raged in the province. These brave men and women were instrumental in containing the many fires that flared up and, at the time of the departure of the final group of 69 firefighters, all the vegetation fires had been contained.

"We are extremely proud of what our participants did by fighting the many fires in the Western Cape during the December and January period. Many of them made extraordinary sacrifices, risking their lives daily to ensure no human lives are lost and that the damage caused by the numerous fires was minimal.

I salute them and thank them for their hard work. It's a pleasure to have them back in the province," says Willem van Aswegen, WOF Free State General Manager.

 Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

Nebo Team has its first female Crew Leader

Antoinette Boshielo has proved that some leaders can be groomed, but for that to happen one has to be disciplined, committed and willing to work hard.

Boshielo grew up in Disenyane Village in Nebo, Limpopo, where the lack of resources was challenging. She completed her matric in 2005 at Moreko Senior Secondary School at Phokwane but due to financial challenges, she couldn't further her studies and was forced to look for a job to help her parents financially.

"I didn't want to be one of those teenagers who get married just to get out of poverty. I wanted to be independent and be a role model for my kids," says Boshielo. However, finding a job with only a matric certificate

proved difficult for Boshielo. She dreamed of finding a job that would open doors for future career goals.

"I was reluctant to join WOF as I didn't see any potential in it, and when I heard I would only be paid a stipend I almost returned home. But I gave it a try to see if it would be worth it," says Boshielo.

She joined WOF in June 2011 as a firefighter and has grown within the programme. She now feels she gained skills and is a more matured person who chases after her dreams. When she was selected to undergo the Type 2 Crew Leader course in Nelspruit, she knew right away that this was her chance to shine and to make history at her home base. Boshielo was

the third female to undergo the Type 2 Crew Leader course at Nebo Base. That on its own put a lot of pressure on her as she didn't want to disappoint her team.

"I was given a chance to rise up the ranks in the programme and I told myself that this was the only chance I had to prove to myself and my family that I can achieve the best," says Boshielo.

She passed her course at the end of 2016. Today Boshielo is a role model to her two children and all the women in her team.



Antoinette Boshielo is the first female participant to successfully complete the Type 2 Crew Leader course



Matema Gwangwa, Provincial Communication Officer, Limpopo

Matric will help participant secure her future

A matric certificate is one of the key qualifications when searching for work, says Maphoka Thomas, a firefighter at Carletonville Base, who recently passed her matric examinations.

Thomas says that she is now fully qualified and equipped to become a structural firefighter as she wishes and the experience acquired in the programme will serve her well in the future.

"It is only through hard work and dedication that I was able to pass my matric. I didn't have a smooth sail but I am grateful for my achievements," says Thomas.

Last year, Thomas did a structural firefighting course in Welkom in the Free State.

"With out matric it was going to be difficult to break through into a structural firefighting career. I am glad that my life was shaped positively after joining the programme," says Thomas, who hails from Matatiele in the Eastern Cape.

Thomas is not the only one who passed her matric last year. Elsie Molahlegi, a Type 2 Crew Leader at the Roodeplaat Team, also wrote and



passed her matric. WOF congratulates both on their excellent results.



Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng

Participants partake in the Goldfields Mielie Marathon

Participants from the Working on Fire Thaba Nchu and Clocolan Teams participated in the annual Goldfields Mielie Marathon. The activities of the day were a 42.2km marathon, the 21.1km half marathon, a 10km race as well as the 5km fun run.

The WOF participants excelled on the day and walked away with many medals. Lerato Chaotsane competed in the 10km race and finished in fifth place. Her teammate Tseise Dikeledi, from the Thaba Nchu Team, achieved eighth place and, because they finished within the top 10, they both received gold medals.

Moleboheng Ratlala ran the 21.1km half marathon and shocked everyone when she crossed the finish line to secure the gold medal and a cash prize of R500.

"I'm so proud of the participants in my region who are using their talents to excel. They grab every opportunity they get within the company and don't only focus on fighting fire, but they also know with their fitness they can change their lives. They performed much better now in comparison to the last marathon as they achieved 3 gold medals and first prize," says Masello Koao, Clocolan Assistant Regional Manager.



Moleboheng Ratlala won the 21.1 km half marathon



Wayne Mokhethi, Provincial Communication Officer, Free State

"I am able to provide for my son"

Pertunia Rasivhaga joined the Working on Fire programme in February 2016. Pertunia says she joined the programme because she needed the job as she was unemployed, but what really attracted her to WOF was the uniform participants wore and the respect it commanded. She said she wanted to be one of those participants and wear that uniform.

Rasivhaga thanks WOF for the contribution the monthly stipend has made in her life and that of her family and seven-year-old child.

"I'm able to provide for my son, buy him Christmas clothes, birthday gifts and pay his school fees," she says. At month end Rasivhaga is able to send money home to Venda and support herself.

Talking about her love for fitness and fighting fires, she says, "I think fitness and exercise made me a stronger person. At my age I still manage to pass fitness tests exceptionally well."

She also loves fighting fires because it allows her to save lives and protect the environment.

"I have discovered more about myself, the environment and my other hidden talents while in the programme. I thank Working on

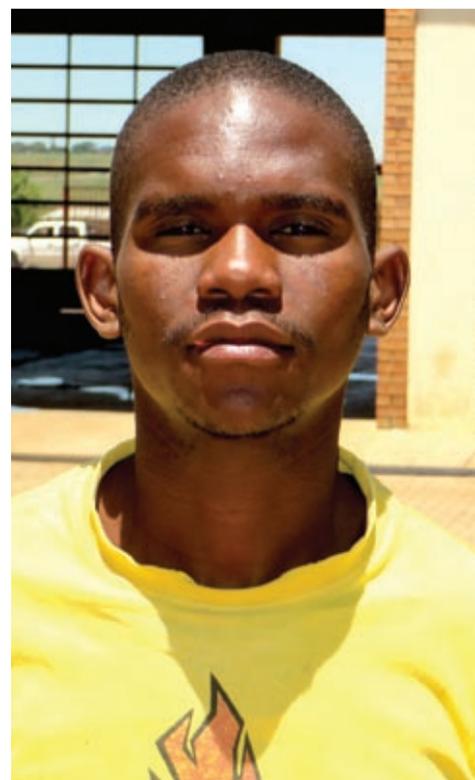


Fire for investing in my skills development and other opportunities afforded to me," says Rasivhaga.



Patricia Maanelo, Provincial Communication Officer, North West

Studying towards Diploma in Fire Technology



Twenty-four-year-old James Ntuli of the Dr JS Moroka Team is a second-year student studying a National Diploma in Fire Technology at the Tshwane University of Technology on a part-time basis.

He says, "I am funding my tuition using the monthly stipend I get from the programme and the support of my parents who get an old age grant."

Ntuli is also a bricklayer who builds houses for people during weekends and uses the money to go towards his education. He says the cost of the course is in the region of R14 000 per annum.

Ntuli only learned of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme late in December, which meant he had to pay for the course himself.

He says the WOF programme is also skilling him for future opportunities.

"By the time I complete my studies, I will be experienced in firefighting; that combination will help me reach greater heights in the firefighting industry," he says.



Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng



WOF prepared me for my new job

Luseko Sikhova, a former firefighter from Tsomo Team in the Eastern Cape, was employed by the South African Police Service (SAPS) early this year.

This enthusiastic young man was recruited by Working on Fire in 2014 after completing his studies.

"I matriculated in 2009 and after that I went to university where I completed my Public Relations Management diploma," explains Sikhova.

He says that after completing his studies he could not get a job until Working on Fire came to his rescue. "When I heard that Working on Fire was recruiting in Tsomo, I went to try my

luck and after completing the fitness test, I was selected to be trained as a firefighter," he says.

Sikhova says that he learned a lot from the programme, from discipline to being able to endure tough situations and being a team player.

"While working at WOF I've faced difficult circumstances, from route marches, being on the fire lines and tough weekly fitness exercises," he says.

Sikhova was part of the crew of WOF firefighters who went to Canada in 2016 to assist with raging veld fires. He said the experience he gained while in Canada developed his firefighting skills and he thanked WOF for this

and many other opportunities presented to him.

"With Working on Fire being my first job I didn't have any experience when it came to job interviews, but the communication workshops offered by WOF helped me gain confidence," Sikhova says.

Sikhova is now undergoing training at the SAPS Training Academy. "I would like to thank Working on Fire for equipping me with skills that were instrumental in getting my new job."



Nthabiseng Mokone, Provincial Communication Officer, Eastern Cape



From fighting fires to fighting crime

It's official, Poulos Molwantwa is now a crime fighter. The former firefighter of Dinokeng Team successfully completed his police training course recently. Molwantwa will be deployed at a police station in Pretoria.

He says that the weekly fitness training he did while working as a firefighter in the programme helped him succeed at the police training academy in Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria.

Molwantwa, who comes from Mamehlakeng in Mpumalanga, joined the Working on Fire programme in 2012 as a firefighter.

"I am thankful for being part of Working on Fire. As a police officer in training, discipline is very important throughout, and that is something WOF instilled in me," he says.

Molwantwa believes that patience and focus helped him reach this stage in his life. He says that he recognises that he will now be saving lives in a different capacity and is ready to tackle violent crimes head on.



Parapara Makgahlela, Provincial Communication Officer, Gauteng

Unemployed youth flock to Vredenburg recruitment



The lives of some young men and women from Vredenburg on the West Coast will never be the same again as they bid farewell to unemployment.

More than 40 determined youth from marginalised communities gathered at the Vredenburg Base in the Western Cape to try their luck at the physically demanding recruitment evaluation. The recruitment assessment included running a 2.4km run within a strict time limit, and completing 40 push-ups and 40 sit-ups.

Congratulations to the 11 new recruits who will complete the 25-day Basic and Advanced Firefighting course at the Working on Fire Training Academy in Nelspruit.

Many young men and women have used these skills as a stepping stone into the formal job market.



Lauren Howard, Provincial Communication Officer, Western Cape

KwaZulu-Natal recruits unemployed youth in preparation for upcoming fire season

The KwaZulu-Natal Ixopo Team recently recruited candidates to top up the team in preparation for the coming winter fire season. The province is currently recruiting to top up teams across the province to ensure that teams are at full strength to fight veld and forest fires in the winter fire season.

Candidates had to complete a 2.4km run, pull-ups, 40 sit-ups and 40 push-ups to ensure participants are fit and would be able to endure long hours on the fire line. Southern KZN Ground Operations Manager Dave Kleyn says, "We have successfully employed 23 participants who are yet to undergo training at WOF Training Academy."

All new recruits will undergo 25 days of training at the Working on Fire Training Academy, including advanced firefighting, fire safety and other specialised skills.



The recruitment process required hopeful recruits to complete a difficult fitness test which included pull-ups



Nompilo Zondi, Provincial Communication Officer, KwaZulu-Natal

North West provides job opportunities to youth

North West has topped up teams during a recruitment process that took place early this year. A total of 45 firefighters (12 female and 33 male firefighters) and one store person were recruited.

"The purpose of recruitment is to strengthen teams and increase production in prevention and control of veld and forest fires. We positively affect the unemployment rate within the communities," says the North West Training Officer, Lydia Sereo.

"We looked for future heroes, people who will be able to pass our fitness test which includes a 2.4km run in less than 12 minutes for males and 14 minutes for females, 40 push-ups, 40 sit-ups and 8 pull-ups. These are followed by interviews," Sereo says.

The new recruits are destined to go to Working on Fire's Training Academy in Mpumalanga where they will be equipped

with highly specialised skills. The firefighters will undergo an intensive 25-day training programme that includes basic and advanced firefighting, fire safety, First Aid and the essentials of integrated fire management.

One of the new recruits at Mamusa Base, Kenneth Kolwane, says he was happy to get the opportunity. "I've been unemployed for a very long time and I'm excited for this new challenge in my life. I believe I will help save lives," says Kolwane.

Molebogeng Pelele, who is at Molopo Base, says she has always been passionate about fighting fires and that the experience she will get will boost her resumé for future prospects.



Patricia Maanelo, Provincial Communication Officer, North West



New recruits excited to be employed in the WOF programme