

34 LIVES LOST IN WILDLAND FIRES IN 2024 **SO FAR**

- 19 people died
while fighting
these fires

By October 2024, South Africa's worst fire season in nine (9) years resulted in the **tragic loss of 34 lives**, including 15 in KwaZulu-Natal alone. With 3,997,732 hectares burned, 66 buildings and 22 vehicles destroyed, and 2,051 livestock lost, the Working on Fire-Kishugu Joint Venture responded to 2,356 fires across multiple provinces at the request of Fire Protection Associations, landowners, conservation agencies, and municipalities. In Mpumalanga, the province leading with fire incidents and where the provincial government has declared a disaster, estimated losses have reached R21 billion.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND RISING TEMPERATURES

According to the C3S's July report, global temperatures have consistently broken monthly records this year, with July alone being the hottest month ever recorded. This exceptional warming has spurred higher-than-normal fire activity worldwide, from Canada to Greece, and South Africa is no exception. Local climate experts, such as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), highlight South Africa's increased fire risk stems from prolonged drought periods and rising seasonal temperatures - conditions ideal for wildfires to ignite and spread more ferociously.

According to CSIR in their [South African Risk and Vulnerability Atlas](#) report published in February 2018, South Africa is facing an increased frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts, dry spells, heat waves, and severe thunderstorms. These have the potential to increase fire risks and vector-borne diseases and lead to food, energy, and water insecurity, which will consequently threaten livelihoods.

Our data from 2024, covering incidents through 31 October, shows an alarming rise in fire activity across South Africa. Our teams responded to 2,356 fires, surpassing the previous record of 2,270 set in 2017.

IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATED FIRE MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

The 2024 season highlighted the importance of an integrated approach to fire management, especially in awareness and prevention efforts. *Read more about our Firesafe Programme on page 8.*

Our Integrated Fire Management Solutions (IFMS) model encompasses both prevention and direct response through the WOF-Kishugu JV units. Kishugu Aviation, with a fleet of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, executed extensive aerial suppression strategies to prevent fires from spreading into populated areas and critical conservation zones. Concurrently, Kishugu Fleet Solutions provided the transportation of deploying ground teams over long distances, ensuring rapid response times despite challenging terrain and logistical complexities.

Through Kishugu Training, over 5,000 of our firefighters from the Working on Fire Programme were prepared to confront this record-breaking season, receiving specialised training on fire suppression techniques, heat safety protocols, and mental resilience during the annual Yellow Card Assessment Camps. This rigorous preparation proved invaluable, particularly as teams faced back-to-back deployments to the frontlines, in extreme heat, dense smoke, and high-stakes scenarios. Additionally, the Kishugu Training facilitated the training of recruits, who will add value and numbers to our ground forces. *Read more about our recent recruits' graduation on page 12.*

THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL TOLL ON FIREFIGHTERS

The record-breaking nature of this season took a significant toll on our firefighters, both physically and mentally. The intensity of these fire seasons increases not only physical demands - like endurance under extreme temperatures - but also psychological strain, as firefighters grapple with prolonged shifts, high-pressure conditions, and smoke exposure.



Our Climate Change Warriors rose to the challenge and stood up to be counted, exemplifying our ATEAM values when repeatedly deployed to fires that spanned multiple days, requiring focus and physical strength to save lives and protect property, and the environment.

REINFORCING RESILIENCE AND READINESS

As the winter fire season ends, the WOF-Kishugu JV remains committed to advancing fire prevention and response strategies to mitigate climate impacts. The record-breaking 2024 season reinforces the importance of our IFMS approach and the necessity of further investment in climate adaptation for fire management. As communities and our environment grow more vulnerable to climate-driven disasters, enhancing awareness, readiness, prevention, and response will be critical.

SUMMER FIRE SEASON

With the winter fire season somewhat behind us, our attention and extensive resources now turn to the upcoming summer fire season, particularly in the Western Cape and western regions of the Eastern Cape. According to forecasts by the SAWS, higher-than-average temperatures, strong winds, and low rainfall are predicted for these regions, raising concerns for another severe fire season. The Western Cape, in particular, is a clear example of the growing risks at the urban-wildland interface, where sprawling residential areas meet fire-prone vegetation (especially fynbos). This interface poses a significant challenge, as more homes and infrastructure are vulnerable to rapidly spreading fires, heightening the need for quick, coordinated responses.

Compounding these challenges, devastating floods earlier this year have increased vegetation growth in many areas of the Western Cape, creating a denser fuel load that can significantly elevate fire risks. While this new vegetation can enhance the landscape's ecological health, it also necessitates a proactive approach to fire prevention. Effective fuel load reduction strategies, such as controlled burns and vegetation management, become critical in mitigating fire hazards in these altered environments.

We will be mobilising resources to these regions, ramping up preparation and readiness of aerial and ground support specifically prepared to assist in saving lives, and protecting both communities and the environment at the urban-wildland boundary. *Read more about our Summer Fire Season Yellowcard Assessment Camps on page 9.*

This summer, our teams are ready to implement all facets of IFMS, drawing from our winter season experiences to meet the anticipated challenges in the months ahead. This year has shown that climate change is no longer a distant threat but an immediate and intensifying challenge. We look to the future with a renewed focus on protecting South Africa's communities and the environment as we prepare for increasingly severe fire seasons.

LOOK OUT AND READ MORE ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND FIRE SEASONS IN OUR UPCOMING SPECIAL PUBLICATION!



Kishugu Aviation & Kishugu Fleet Solutions drive Integrated Fire Management Excellence

It is fitting to highlight the critical roles that Kishugu Aviation and Kishugu Fleet Solutions play in advancing the mission of the Working on Fire – Kishugu Joint Venture. Their contributions are essential in cementing leadership in integrated fire management across the country, ensuring that effective transportation and aerial support are at the forefront of our firefighting efforts.

This year has seen a significant increase in veld and forest fires, with incidents reaching levels not witnessed since 2017. In response to this growing challenge, our aerial resources have been instrumental, logging substantial hours in the skies to support fire suppression operations nationwide.

Between January and September 2024, our aerial fleet performed various critical functions, totaling **2 483.78 hours**. The busiest month was July, with **681.45 flight hours** reported, followed by August with **494.61 hours**, and January with **473.25 hours**.

KEY CONTRIBUTORS TO THESE EFFORTS INCLUDE:

- **Spotter planes**, responsible for air traffic control during firefighting missions, flew an impressive **1,065 hours**.
- **Huey helicopters**, equipped with 1,000-litre Bambi buckets for water bombing, logging **888.77 hours**.
- The powerful **AT-802 planes**, boasting a 3,000-litre capacity, which contributed over **529.78 hours** of flight time.

These aerial assets continue to be an integral part of our firefighting strategy, ensuring timely and effective responses to wildfires across South Africa.



On the ground, **Kishugu Fleet Solutions (KFS)** has been pivotal in providing tailored transportation that supports effective fire management operations. Their fleet includes specialised fire trucks designed to transport fire crews, equipment, and water, enabling teams to respond rapidly to fires and efficiently combat flames at the frontlines. These vehicles are built to meet the unique demands of firefighting, ensuring that the right resources are always available.

In addition to its advanced fleet, Kishugu Fleet Solutions uses cutting-edge **telematics technology** to enhance driver safety and fleet efficiency. This system tracks critical driving metrics such as speed, braking, and seatbelt usage, allowing for real-time analysis of driver behaviour. By identifying risky practices - such as harsh braking or speeding - corrective actions can be implemented to improve safety. Real-time feedback alerts drivers to adjust unsafe behaviours, leading to a significant reduction in accidents, with research indicating reductions of up to **20%**. This proactive approach has resulted in measurable decreases in traffic violations and accidents across the fleet.

Regular maintenance is also crucial to the success of KFS. Their vehicles undergo scheduled servicing to prevent breakdowns, ensuring that operations continue smoothly without disruptions. This not only supports efficient fire management activities but also helps maintain the long-term value of the vehicles.

We recognise and celebrate the critical contributions of Kishugu Aviation and Kishugu Fleet Solutions in enhancing our firefighting capabilities. Together, they are driving integrated fire management excellence in South Africa, equipping our firefighting teams to face the challenges posed by wildfires intensified by climate change.





Deputy Minister Bernice Swarts Urges Greater Responsibility in Wildfire Prevention

In a media briefing at Parliament in Cape Town on Tuesday, 15 October 2024, Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE), Bernice Swarts, called on all South Africans to take greater responsibility in protecting communities and the environment from the devastating impacts of wildfires. Alongside Minister Dion George and Deputy Minister Narend Singh, Swarts highlighted the Ministry's achievements in their first 100 days in office.

Swarts praised the role of the Working on Fire Programme, which manages wildfire incidents on behalf of the Department across South Africa's provinces. She noted the increasing challenges posed by climate change, including more frequent and intense heatwaves and high winds that are driving unprecedented wildfire risks. "Farmers can no longer conduct controlled burns without carefully considering wind conditions," she explained.

Referring to recent fires in the North West, Free State, and KwaZulu-Natal provinces, Swarts mentioned that the South African Weather Service has warned of strong winds in Limpopo, which could increase wildfire risks - a new phenomenon in the area. She also highlighted the Department's ongoing collaboration with Fire Protection Associations to improve wildfire management nationwide.

Swarts addressed the importance of fire break maintenance on farms, warning that the Department will begin verifying fire breaks to ensure compliance. "We cannot only be called in when aerial support is required, everyone must take responsibility to prevent fires," she stated.

Emphasising wildfire prevention as a collective responsibility, Swarts urged communities to stay vigilant and proactive. She called for increased public awareness, especially among drivers, citing a recent incident in the Free State where a wildfire was ignited by a discarded cigarette.

POTENTIAL WILDFIRE CATASTROPHE LOOMS

amid Climate Change Concerns

The Working on Fire (WOF) Programme's Managing Director, Trevor Abrahams, warned about the severe consequences of climate change and wildfires during the recent Emergency Service Conference 2024, held over two days in Johannesburg. The conference gathered leaders and experts in emergency services and they addressed emergency response across South Africa.

Abrahams highlighted the devastating human cost of wildfires, noting that "at least 14 people lost their lives in the KwaZulu-Natal wildfires in 2024 alone, with over 30 fatalities recorded in 2023." This tragic loss of life underscores the increasing intensity and frequency of these fires. Abrahams further remarked that 2024 has been one of the worst years in recent memory, with the Working on Fire-Kishugu Joint Venture responding to record fires.

Abrahams emphasised the urgent need for a collective approach to fire prevention and preparedness. He outlined critical measures, including public awareness and education, fuel load reduction, invasive alien species eradication, advanced wildfire firefighter training, expanding the Incident Command System, and bolstering aerial firefighting capabilities. He noted that, **by 2030, South Africa will require at least 17,000 skilled wildfire firefighters to meet the demands of a warming climate.**

The conference also served as a platform for sharing best practices in emergency services. Leading organisations in attendance included FIRE OPS SA, Fidelity SecureFire, Medi-Response, the Southern African Emergency Services Institute, City of Tshwane, and the Safety First Association.

In addition to the broader discussions, Louis Pretorius, Chief Fire Officer at Fidelity SecureFire, praised WOF for its excellence in producing well-trained firefighters and dispatchers. FIRE OPS SA has also recruited four former WOF firefighters, with Pretorius commending their exceptional fitness, skills, and discipline: "Their fitness levels, competency, and discipline are par excellence."



CREATING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

through FireSafe Initiatives

Our Fire Awareness (FA) Department has taken proactive steps in integrated fire management through its FireSafe Awareness programmes. These initiatives, which included workshops for educators and community members, aimed to build resilient communities that take ownership of fire risk reduction.

In KwaZulu-Natal, the WOF-Kishugu JV collaborated with the Assupol Community Trust to enhance the delivery of quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) services for children aged 0-5. The ECD project also extended to various provinces where WOF-Kishugu JV operates. Our goal is to create wildfire-adaptive communities through strong partnerships with the public and private sectors, allowing for the sharing of resources and knowledge.

Zanele Nxumalo, Head of the Fire Awareness Department, reported, “We received great feedback from our launch, with over 100 supervisors, principals, and ECD educators present. During phase two, we had 82 supervisors and educators attend the ECD FireSafe Workshops.”

Siyazama Creche Supervisor, Ms. Monica Mabaso, added, “We learned the skills to instill FireSafe techniques, ensuring our little ones understand the risks and dangers of fire, which will hopefully reduce unwanted fires at home due to children playing with fire.”

The International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction (IDDRR), observed on October 13, focused on the role of education in protecting and empowering youth for a disaster-free future, with the 2024 theme being “Youth and Future Generations.” The IDDRR called on countries to leverage the education sector to mitigate disaster risks for school-aged children by investing in safe schools and educational facilities. The IDDRR project also took place across all provinces where the WOF-Kishugu JV operates.

The FA Department partnered with stakeholders to raise awareness in vulnerable communities about disaster preparedness and risk reduction. Through its interventions, the WOF-Kishugu JV enabled communities, learners, and teachers to understand how to protect themselves and their homes, ultimately reducing fire risks, deaths, and property loss. Additionally, reassessments were conducted at schools needing further guidance to ensure they were well-informed about staying FireSafe.





GEARING UP FOR SUMMER FIRE SEASON

amid record-breaking
wildfire conditions

Following a record-breaking winter fire season - characterised by unprecedented temperatures and a surge in wildfire incidents - preparations for the upcoming summer fire season in the Western Cape and the western region of the Eastern Cape have gained heightened urgency. With the season set to begin on 1 December 2024, the Working on Fire-Kishugu Joint Venture (WOF-Kishugu JV) is intensifying efforts to ensure readiness, as forecasts predict an equally intense summer season. Rising temperatures and prolonged dry spells, influenced by climate change, stress the critical need for preparedness to protect both communities and our environment.

KISHUGU TRAINING ACADEMY BUILDING READINESS THROUGH RIGOROUS TRAINING

A cornerstone of WOF-Kishugu JV's preparedness is the rigorous training provided by Kishugu Training Academy, which has trained wildland firefighters to an international standard for over 15 years. This world-class training, delivered by Kishugu Training Instructors - many of whom are former firefighters - ensures that every firefighter is equipped with the physical, mental, and tactical skills needed to face the season's challenges.

This year's Yellow Card Training Assessment began on 2 October in the western region of the Eastern Cape and has seen close to 300 firefighters from 14 bases undergo comprehensive evaluations. Two groups, each comprising five teams, were assessed in the Witelsbos area, while other teams completed their assessments at their respective bases. These evaluations are central to verifying that each firefighter meets the standards upheld by the WOF-Kishugu JV.

The assessments include a 2.4-kilometre run, sit-ups, push-ups, and pull-ups, all designed to confirm the firefighters' readiness for the strenuous demands of the fireline. Phumza Dyantyi, General Manager in the Eastern Cape, highlighted the significance of these assessments: "The Yellow Card Assessment is not only a legal requirement, it is an essential measure to ensure our firefighters are fully prepared - physically, mentally, and tactically - for the challenging season ahead, which will likely be intensified by current climate conditions."





In the Western Cape, the Kishugu Training Academy also led annual refresher training sessions in the Southern Cape and Western regions, equipping firefighters with specialised techniques and knowledge that meet international standards. A total of 756 firefighters in the Western Cape have been evaluated and are prepared to respond to emergencies. Dyantyi noted, “Our former firefighters, now instructors, bring hands-on expertise, ensuring that each crew member is fully prepared to tackle wildland fires safely and effectively.”

COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS AND AWARENESS

In addition to firefighter training, WOF-Kishugu JV has prioritised community education to strengthen fire safety in high-risk areas. In partnership with CapeNature, the Greater Cederberg Fire Protection Association, West Coast District Municipality, and Cederberg Local Municipality, a fire awareness campaign recently launched in Citrusdal aims to equip residents in vulnerable areas with practical fire safety knowledge. Awareness initiatives have since extended to schools and communities across the province, promoting fire safety knowledge to protect lives and property.

FACING THE CHALLENGES OF A CHANGING CLIMATE

The recent winter fire season’s intensity, driven by climate change, has shown that fire management strategies must adapt to increasing risks. With higher temperatures and prolonged dry periods as the new norm, WOF-Kishugu JV’s commitment to Integrated Fire Management Solutions ensures both regional teams are ready to manage the unprecedented challenges of this season. Dyantyi emphasised the unique combination of discipline, teamwork, and strict adherence to safety protocols required in firefighting, enabling firefighters to operate safely on the fireline and safeguard their communities.

As the summer fire season approaches, WOF-Kishugu JV stands prepared to meet the challenges ahead, protecting communities, the environment, and resources through dedicated training, assessments, and proactive community outreach.

Philani Memela's Commitment to Firefighting Excellence

Philani Memela's journey with the Working on Fire (WOF) Programme began in 2003 at the Umngeni Fire Station in Howick, KwaZulu-Natal. From the moment he donned his uniform, he embraced the Programme's mission with dedication: saving lives and protecting the environment from the devastating impacts of wildfires.

Memela's ascent through the ranks is a testament to his hard work and commitment. Starting as a Crew Leader Type 2 in February 2004, he demonstrated skill and leadership. His progression to Type 1 in August 2005 signalled the beginning of a significant career path. By 2016, he stepped into the role of Provincial Training Officer, and in 2019, he took on the responsibilities of the Midlands Assistant Regional Manager. His leadership journey culminated in October 2024, when he was appointed Ground Operations Manager (GOM) for KwaZulu-Natal (KZN).

Reflecting on this achievement, this former firefighter speaks not just of pride but of the responsibilities that accompany leadership. "Representing KZN is a huge honour, yet the expectations are daunting," he shares. He faces the challenge of maintaining a high work ethic across the province, inspiring Regional Managers, Base Managers, and Crew Leaders to meet their targets.

At the core of his leadership philosophy lies the importance of communication. Memela understands that clear, consistent dialogue with Base Partners is essential, especially during intense fire seasons. He emphasises our core values: accountability, teamwork, excellence, adaptability, and the drive to make a difference. "These values help us find solutions, both in our work and in our lives," he states, reminding us that leadership is as much about nurturing relationships as it is about achieving goals.

Memela's expertise transcends borders. His experiences in international deployments to Canada - first in 2016 and again in 2023 - opened his eyes to new firefighting techniques and global perspectives. "Each experience has taught me invaluable lessons," he reflects, expressing gratitude to WOF for these opportunities. They have shaped him into the leader he is today, one who understands the weight of responsibility and the value of collaboration. Throughout his career, Memela faced numerous significant fires across South Africa. Each blaze represents a unique challenge, requiring different strategies and approaches. Yet, he remains steadfast in his commitment to safety. "Every fire is major," he affirms, "and our primary focus must always be on ensuring safety at all times."

Reflecting on his 21-year journey with WOF, this alum attributes his success to perseverance, hard work, and the invaluable mentorship he has received. "I am grateful for the incredible individuals who have supported and guided me," he expresses with humility. "Their encouragement has propelled me forward, from my early days to my current role."

Philani Memela's story is not just one of career advancement, it is a testament to the heart and soul of the Working on Fire Programme. His journey reminds us that every individual's dedication to their community and environment can make a difference in the face of adversity.



EMPOWERING A NEW GENERATION of Wildland Firefighters

In a step toward enhancing wildfire management in South Africa, the Working on Fire-Kishugu Joint Venture (WOF-Kishugu JV) welcomed 72 new recruits. These young individuals completed an intensive training programme at the Kishugu Training Academy (KTA), equipping them with essential skills to tackle the growing threat of wildland fires exacerbated by climate change.

The Kishugu Training Academy has been a leader in skills development for over 15 years, shaping the future of thousands of professionally trained young wildland and structural firefighters who meet international standards. The academy, based in Nelspruit, began its journey in early 2005 with just two full-time instructors, including Khomotso Moagi, who served as Assistant Training Manager at the time. “We trained structural firefighters in Graskop and wildland firefighters in Nelspruit. Instructors used to conduct training at the bases nationally. It was in 2007 when all the training activities were consolidated in Nelspruit,” she shared.

With wildfires becoming more frequent and severe, the training provided by KTA has never been more critical. The academy’s commitment to developing skilled firefighters ensures that these recruits are not only ready to face the challenges posed by wildfires but also dedicated to saving lives, protecting the environment, and making a difference. The training encompassed practical firefighting techniques, safety protocols, and the importance of teamwork - skills crucial for effective fire management in the field.

Moagi emphasised, “With climate change fueling the country’s wildfires, young people need to receive the necessary skills to tackle this perennial problem. We have

over 5,000 firefighters, both men and women, who are climate change warriors as they mitigate wildfires across the country and abroad.”

An estimated 7,000 wildland firefighters have been trained at KTA, paving the way for new career paths. This one of many graduation ceremonies symbolises more than the completion of a course, it represents opportunities for advancement within WOF. The WOF-Kishugu JV is committed to nurturing talent and providing various skills development initiatives. Recruits are encouraged to grow and progress through the ranks, gaining invaluable experience along the way. Those who aspire to exit the programme and transition into new career paths can do so, as demonstrated by Memonto Masombuka, a former firefighter who recently joined Ops Fire SA as a structural firefighter.

Masombuka’s journey is a testament to the academy’s impact on individual lives. He credits KTA with upskilling him, noting that his current employer is impressed with his fitness and competence levels. “The Kishugu Training Academy instructors instilled a sense of discipline and focus in what we did as wildland firefighters. The rigorous and stringent training empowered us with skills,” explained Masombuka. His story exemplifies how the academy not only prepares emerging firefighters to tackle immediate firefighting challenges but also equips them for broader career opportunities in the field.

The WOF-Kishugu JV congratulates these newest wildland firefighting heroes as they embark on their journey. Their commitment is a beacon of hope for communities facing the increasing threat of wildfires, and their hard work reflects a determination to make a positive impact.





YONELISA PONI CLAIMS EASTERN CAPE BOXING TITLE

Yonelisa Poni, a firefighter from the Newlands Base, embodies the Working on Fire-Kishugu Joint Venture's core value of excellence, both in her fieldwork and her passion: boxing. Last month, this young woman claimed the Eastern Cape Boxing Championship female title, solidifying her place as a reigning

champion.

Her achievements in the ring were celebrated with great excitement by the Western Cape management team. General Manager Antoniette Jini welcomed Poni and her coaches to the provincial office, commending her discipline. "Her commitment is inspirational," Jini said, noting how her fitness as a firefighter has become invaluable in her athletic pursuits.

Poni joined the Working on Fire Programme earlier this year, finding a natural synergy between her work and her training, both of which demand resilience and peak physical fitness. Her love for boxing began at age 14, and she has never looked back since.

Her coach, Jongi Kamko, praised her drive and self-motivation, qualities that have made coaching her a pleasure. "Yonelisa has a burning passion for boxing, she never needs a push. She is one of the easiest to coach," he shared, expressing gratitude to the Working on Fire - Kishugu JV for supporting her journey. The two met by chance when Poni joined Kamko's gym, where he quickly recognised her raw talent and took her under his wing, helping her refine her technique and reach new heights.

Well done Yonelisa! #Excellence!



A FIREFIGHTER'S HEART

Our wildland firefighters continue to make a profound impact in their communities. Nokuthula Medupe, a firefighter from Gauteng, recently restored the confidence of Mpho Lesolle, a Grade 8 learner at Relebogile Secondary School in Khutsong, by purchasing him a pair of school shoes.



During a fire awareness presentation for Grades 8 and 9 at Relebogile Secondary School - part of the integrated fire management activities - Medupe met Mpho and was deeply moved by his situation. She noticed his worn-out shoes and felt compelled to help.

"I was touched by the plight of a learner with shoes that were barely holding up," Medupe shared. Initially, Mpho was hesitant to accept assistance, fearing he might be a victim of a kidnapping. However, Medupe patiently persuaded him to accept her offer. "Mpho gave me his mother's number, which I called, and she agreed to the purchase," she explained. Medupe used her stipend to buy the shoes, saying, "My weakness is that I love children, and nothing comes between me and them." Her selfless act gave Mpho a renewed sense of pride and eagerness to attend classes, despite the financial hardships he faces.

"Against the odds, Mpho's confidence had been crushed into smithereens, but we all have a responsibility to assist one another," Medupe emphasised. As a mother herself, she finds fulfillment in helping children in need, often cooking for the less fortunate in the area on weekends. "Our children need our love and care to thrive in their studies and grow into better people," she added.

Mpho expressed his gratitude, saying he felt elated and thankful for Medupe's generous gesture. Her actions exemplify the compassion, commitment and objective of making a difference that define the firefighters of the Working on Fire - Kishugu Joint Venture, showing that even small acts of kindness can have a lasting impact on a child's life.



#Beyond the Fire Line

WOF Alumni

UNSUNG HEROES OF WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT

As we observed Transport Month, we recognise the vital role that our Dispatch and Coordination Department plays in the Working on Fire – Kishugu Joint Venture. These dedicated professionals are the unsung heroes behind the scenes, facilitating the movement of resources essential for Integrated Fire Management Solutions (IFMS). Their efforts ensure that our aerial and ground firefighting teams are equipped and ready to respond swiftly and effectively during fire emergencies.

One such hero is Marubini Malaka, whose journey from firefighter to Dispatcher Type 1 exemplifies resilience and dedication in a traditionally male-dominated field. Born and raised in Duthini Village, Venda, Malaka's path with the Working on Fire Programme began in June 2012 with the opening of a new base in Phiphidi, Limpopo. Initially starting as a wildland firefighter, she quickly demonstrated her potential, earning her Field and Forestry Firefighting certificate within just three (3) months.

As she progressed through various roles, including SHE Rep and Dispatcher Type 3, Malaka continuously pursued her education and professional development. With the support of WOF, she obtained a National Diploma in Public Management, a Certificate in Project Management, and an N6 National Certificate in Electrical Engineering.

Despite facing challenges like language barriers and adapting to different operational environments, Malaka's perseverance led her to become a Aerial Resources Dispatcher Type 1 in Nelspruit in 2023. "I was excited about the new role and its challenges," she says, appreciating the opportunity to meet clients and adapt to different operational styles. In December 2023, she was selected to assist in the Western Cape as a Dispatcher Type 2 during an intense fire season, where her dedication was recognised by her team and clients alike.

Her journey is a testament to the importance of representation and empowerment in the firefighting industry. A firm believer in skills development, Malaka is currently pursuing a degree in Public Management at UNISA, a pursuit she credits to the support of the WOF - Kishugu JV. "The stipend allowed me to further my studies, shaping my future. I urge young people never to give up."

Marubini Malaka's story not only highlights the critical support provided by the Dispatch and Coordination Department but also serves as an inspiration to others in male-dominated industries, proving that with determination and support, anything is possible.





FORMER FIREFIGHTER SECURES A NEW OPPORTUNITY

Key successes of the Working on Fire Programme over the past 21 years include the vital skills development and training it has provided to thousands of participants, many of whom have successfully transitioned into the formal employment sector.

Every year, a significant number of participants exit the programme to pursue full-time employment across various industries. In 2024 alone, numerous young men and women in the Eastern Cape have begun new careers with organisations such as the South African Police Service, SanParks, Mountain To Ocean, and various private companies.

One such success story is Siviwe Magaiyana, a former participant who has embraced a better opportunity outside of WOF. Grateful for the skills he acquired during his tenure, Magaiyana reflected on his journey. Recruited in 2010 as part of the Langeni team, he dedicated 14 years to the programme, during which he developed skills as a brush cutter and a SHE Representative.

"I am currently working for MTO as a driver," Magaiyana shared. His experience also includes two deployments to Canada, which provided him with invaluable international firefighting skills.

"Working on Fire played a major role in making me a better person, and I am so happy to have been part of the programme," he concluded.

Magaiyana's story exemplifies the transformative impact of the Working on Fire Programme, highlighting how it not only equips individuals with essential skills but also opens doors to new opportunities and careers.

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AND START YOUR
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embark on a transformative journey!



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