

Friday, November 14, 2014

MEDIA RELEASE

‘Know the code’ to reduce fire risks this harvest

With an early start to harvest and the fire season in 2014, Grain Producers SA is encouraging growers to be aware of the risks and follow the Grain Harvesting Code of Practice.

With the South Australian Country Fire Service responding to many more fires than normal for this time of year, GPSA says it is a timely reminder to growers to revisit practices outlined in the code.

CFS Director - Preparedness Operations Leigh Miller says the higher number of fires is because the soil is extremely dry.

“This is similar to conditions we would expect in February, and it means the grasses are extremely volatile,” he said. “It is important that we take this into consideration when we undertake any of our normal tasks, make sure we have appropriate precautions in place, and remain vigilant.”

The code outlines the conditions under which grain harvesting and handling operations should be conducted in the paddock, including operation of grain harvesters, vehicles involved in grain transport, and grain dryers and augers.

Key points outlined in the code for growers include:

- Stop harvest when the local actual (not forecast) Grassland Fire Danger Index (GFDI) exceeds 35.
- Before harvest, establish a minimum 4-metre fire break around the boundary of crops or paddocks to be reaped.
- Keep crop residues on machines to a minimum, particularly engines, exhausts or brakes.
- Regularly maintain machinery before and during harvest, particularly wearing parts and bearings.
- Reduce potential build-up of static electricity while reaping.
- Carry the prescribed equipment - such as water, extinguisher and a shovel - and have immediate access to a UHF CB radio or mobile phone.
- Keep a farm fire fighting unit in the paddock being harvested.

GPSA Chief Executive Officer Darren Arney said producers' use of the code had seen a steady decline in harvest fires in the past decade, which was encouraging and showed that adhering to the code was working for the grain industry.

“The move away from a blanket ban on harvesting on fire ban days has given grain producers the opportunity to calculate their local fire risk, which gives them the ability to monitor conditions on their own farm, rather than relying on a district forecast,” he said.

“For example a grower in a coastal location will have significantly different weather conditions compared to a more inland farmer in the same fire district.”

"This voluntary code provides measurable parameters around when farmers should cease harvesting at a local level, as well as being able to calculate when they can commence again if conditions improve later in the evening. A fire during harvest can be costly to you, your neighbours and your community."

The GFDI is calculated using a mathematical relationship between fuel curing (assumed to be 100pc for grain harvesting); air temperature; wind speed; and relative humidity (see Table 1). A fire index of 35 or more is unlikely to be controlled by a harvest operator's fire fighting resources.

GPSA encourages growers to use a weather meter or a portable weather station to ensure they know the index value and can stop harvesting when the GFDI approaches 35.

The Grain Harvesting Code of Practice is online at <http://bit.ly/14bJ0x9>

Table 1: Calculate if wind speed is too high to harvest

The table calculates the average wind speed (km/hr) for different temperatures (°C) and relative humidity (RH %) that equates to a Grassland Fire Danger Index of 35, for example:

1. Temperature = 35°C
2. Relative humidity = 14% (round down to 10%)
3. For this combination, grain harvesting must cease when average wind speed is greater than 26km/hr.

TEMP °C	5	10	15	20	25	30	40	50	60	65	RH%*
15	31	35	38	40	43	45	49	53	56	58	AVERAGE WIND SPEED (KPH)
20	29	33	36	38	40	43	46	50	53	55	
25	27	30	33	36	38	40	44	47	50	52	
30	25	28	31	33	35	37	41	44	47	49	
35	23	26	28	31	33	35	38	41	44	46	
40	21	24	26	28	30	32	35	39	41	43	
45	19	22	24	26	28	30	33	36	39	40	
TEMP °C	5	10	15	20	25	30	40	50	60	65	RH%*

*RH% (Relative Humidity rounded down)
*Wind speed averaged over 10 minutes

ENDS

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