

# Greater Rustenburg Fire Protection Association



E-mail: [grfpa.fire@gmail.com](mailto:grfpa.fire@gmail.com)

WEBSITE: <https://www.grfpa.org/>

## Firebreaks



*"The purpose of a firebreak is to provide an area of reduced fuel load which will reduce the intensity of a fire..." (Working on Fire)*

A firebreak does not necessarily stop a fire, especially in severe weather conditions. However, it can provide:

- valuable time by slowing the advance of the fire,
- access to the fire,
- a point from where the fire can be attacked,
- a point from where back burns can be started.



### Who must make firebreaks?

The National Veld and Forest Fire Act, 101 of 1998 (NVFFA), sec 12 (1) reads:

*"Every owner on whose land a veldfire may start or burn or from whose land it may spread must prepare and maintain a firebreak on his or her side of the boundary between his or her land and any adjoining land."*

"Owner" according to the ACT includes a lessee or person who controls the land in terms of a contract, the executive body of communal land or executive council of the provincial administration of state owned land.



### How wide must a firebreak be?

The Act does not stipulate dimensions, it says:

*"An owner who is obliged to prepare and maintain a firebreak must ensure that, with due regard to the weather, climate, terrain and vegetation of the area—*

- (a) it is wide enough and long enough to have a reasonable chance of preventing a veldfire from spreading to or from neighbouring land;*
- (b) it does not cause soil erosion; and*
- (c) it is reasonably free of inflammable material capable of carrying a veldfire across it."*

Owners must assess firebreak widths according to the risk involved, taking into account prevailing wind direction, climate, terrain, vegetation, accessibility etc.

A useful "rule of thumb" is to make a firebreak 2.5 times the height of the surrounding vegetation. Where bushes and trees are present, a wider break is necessary to avoid "spotting" (fires caused by flying embers).

Around dwellings, the recommended width of "defendable space" is 10 metres.



### Methods of preparing firebreaks:

A firebreak may occur naturally where there is a lack of vegetation or "fuel", such as a river, dam or rocky ledge, or be man-made, such as roads or farm tracks.

Firebreaks can be burnt or prepared mechanically by grading, slashing, brush cutting, poisoning etc. depending on the practical circumstances and cost effectiveness of each case.