



Media release
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New policy introduced on fire call out costs

People who breach fire restrictions and light fires during the prohibited fire season currently in place can now expect to receive a bill to reimburse fire services for the cost of the call out.

Selwyn District Council approved a new policy this week which will see a minimum \$500 (plus GST) charge imposed on people who light fires when a prohibited fire season is in place or who light fires when a restricted fire season is in place without observing fire safety guidelines.

Principal Rural Fire Officer Wilson Brown says that this summer there have been a number of fires in Selwyn District which have threatened lives and property. "Fire services have been extremely busy responding to call outs. It is very time consuming for volunteer fire fighters to attend call outs and also expensive to put out fires – the fire response to the Selwyn Road fire in January cost \$100,000 alone."

He says that it is very important to have a policy in place which deters people from lighting fires in conditions when it is unsafe to do so. "Fires which are started when a prohibited fire season is in place and the fire risk is extreme put the community at risk. The new policy sends a clear signal to people who flout the rules that this is unacceptable."

The new policy would also apply during a restricted fire season if people light fires without observing the safety guidelines in place. In a restricted fire season only gas barbeques, crop residue fires and fires inside drums are allowed. The guidelines require that people:

- don't light a fire in high winds or if high winds are forecast
- always have a water source on hand
- have a 10 metre fire break in place for a crop fire, and
- stay with the fire at all times and dial 111 if it gets out of control.

Currently a prohibited fire season is in place across Selwyn District, which means that no fires can be lit except for gas barbeques if the property is serviced by a high pressure water supply.

"Previously ratepayers have been paying for the cost of attending fire callouts. Where fire fighters respond to unnecessary callouts because people have lit fires when they are not allowed to or haven't followed fire safety guidelines, it is appropriate that the person who started the fire should pay for this cost," says Mr Brown.

Under the new policy approved by the Council, a \$500 (plus GST) minimum charge will be imposed on people found not to have observed fire restrictions or fire safety guidelines. If the cost of responding to the fire is higher than \$500, a higher charge may be imposed.

Mr Brown says that it is important that all property owners have insurance which covers fire damage, fire fighting and public liability insurance. "People should also always check what fire restrictions are in place by visiting www.selwyn.govt.nz/fire or phoning the Council before lighting a fire," he adds.

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