

#Wildfire Ready Convention

to be held in November 2018, Western Cape

Globally, the general public have become accustomed to seeing immense wildfires destroying massive tracts of shrub and forestlands every year. Canada, Portugal, Chile, Russia, USA, Australia, Spain, South Africa and others have all experienced catastrophic fires in the last two years. The severe financial losses caused by these same fires to properties and assets are significant, as cities expand and people continue to relentlessly develop land but more than this, substantial wildfires have a pronounced long term impact on the communities and people that are in the paths of such fires.

The wildland-urban interface (WUI), a transition zone between the built and the unoccupied natural environment, is highly conducive to runaway fires and its footprint is increasing exponentially, while providing the ideal recipe for damaging and dangerous wildfires to impact upon people living and working within the landscape. In South Africa, especially in the Western Cape with its harsh Mediterranean climate, warming temperatures and uncertain rainfall, has caused some of the worst droughts in recorded history, which has sparked a range of water restrictions in many cities and towns. With the inevitable realities of climate change becoming more apparent and residential fire losses associated with wildland fires gaining both national and global attention, the need to create fire resilient communities is essential. Climate change is altering our landscapes through a combination of widespread drought, alien invasive species, poorly managed properties, and an ever increasing number of homes being built in the WUI contribute to the loss of life, property and natural resources.

Wildfires are an important and necessary ecological occurrence in many natural areas of South Africa but also present a risk to homes constructed in or next to, such areas. The growing threat of WUI fires must be addressed

if we are to avoid further catastrophe in South Africa. The devastating June 2017 Knysna and Plettenberg Bay fires taught us that under extreme weather conditions, any ignition can turn into an overwhelming fire destroying and consuming everything in its path, if the landscape has not been managed in anticipation of a wildfire event.

Wildland fire managers as well as fire officers from local and district municipalities, metropolitan areas and officials from disaster management authorities will have to ensure that all fire fighters are adequately trained to deal with WUI fires on a daily basis, regardless of what kind of community they serve.

The #Wildfire Ready Convention will present contemporary practical training and dialogue about addressing, mitigating, preventing and fighting fire in today's challenging context, including demonstrations dealing with some of the tangible hazards associated with living in the WUI, how residents can help protect their properties and communities by taking informed steps before and during the wildfire season to make their properties properly defensible from the inevitable threat of fire.

A national system shift towards nationwide wildfire readiness and resilience is possible and the need to create fire resilient communities is now becoming fundamentally essential. Wildland fires are migrating into populated areas with greater frequency and severity and the #Wildfire Ready Convention will concentrate not only on how to fight these fires but share best practices for prevention and mitigation of these fire events.

Integrated fire management (IFM) and its four operational components ie reduction, readiness, response and recovery, linked to the WUI will be the distinct focus.

The #Wildfire Ready Convention focussing on the future of targeting

wildfires in WUI will be the first of its kind in the Western Cape and will be hosted on the world-renowned Lourensford Wine Estate, one of the oldest and most historic agricultural farms in South Africa. The convention will proudly host both international (Canada, USA and Europe) and local fire specialists and will also provide an opportunity to discuss the disastrous wildfires that have taken place with relevance to the WUI.

Being held in late November, the convention will coincide with the commencement of the Western Cape's wildfire season where fire authorities will be in final stages of readiness. The annual opening of the Western Cape's wildfire season event will also be held at the convention where the Western Cape MEC for Local Government, Environmental Affairs and Development Planning will open proceedings where dignitaries and the media can witness a live aerial fire fighting and ground crew demonstration.

Programme

- Due to the uniqueness of the event a maximum of 300 delegates will be accepted to attend the two days of the conference
- A pre-convention two day training session on the 'Home ignition zone' will be available for a maximum of 50 participants
- A post-convention one day training session on 'Fireline safety' will be available for a maximum of 50 participants
- The 'Opening of the Western Cape Wildfire Season 2018' will coincide with the two day #Wildfire Ready Convention. This will include an aerial fire fighting and ground crew demonstration
- Selected exhibitors will also be invited to display fire fighting equipment, gear, tools, resources and vehicles during the two day convention

A detailed full programme will be circulated once finalised. ▲