

Western Cape Fire Season
Media release by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry
30 November 2007

Most large forest fires during the year 2006 and 2007 occurred along major main roads of the Western Cape, the N1 and the N2. "A big fire last year occurred close to DuToit's Kloof (N1) and also along the Outeniqua Pass (N2)", according to the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry.

Although this Department is the manager of the National Veld and Forest Act of 1998, the Provincial Department of Local Government and Housing plays a crucial role in implementing this act, as well as the Department's Working on Fire Programme.

The fire season in the Western Cape begins in November and ends in May of every year. "But this year this season started earlier, around August 2007", according to the Provincial Department's Fire Brigade Specialist, Heinrich Munnik.

Recent veld and forest fires in the Western Cape and other areas of the country destroyed lives, property and the environment. In addition, this year's early fires were more severe than last year's. Thus the Department of Water Affairs is concerned about the increasing threat of veld and forest fires, and would like to warn the public not to make fire in the open air.

According to the National Veld and Forest Fire Act of 1998, every landowner where there is a risk of veldfire needs to take certain minimum precaution to prevent and combat veldfires. The act further stipulates that landowners need to prepare boundary firebreaks, have equipment, trained personnel and protective clothing for fire fighting. Landowners are to always have a responsible person appointed to act on their behalf in case of a fire, and fight fires on his/her own and on adjoining land where fires threaten life, property or the environment.

Although the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry declares a prohibition on the making of fires in the open air for fire seasons every year, the public does not seem to adhere to this warning. This year, areas under a year -long prohibition include the Cape Peninsula.

Areas under a 6 months prohibition (1 November 2007 to 30 April 2008) include the districts of Swellendam, Montagu, Worcester, Robertson, Clanwilliam, Piketberg, Ceres, Tulbagh, Caledon, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Strand and Somerset West.

Government urges the public to never leave a fire unattended, and to keep emergency numbers close by.

Contact:
Joel Syphus
Cell: 082. 808. 2739