

Newsflash

14 May 2001

Public Alert On Karbonkelberg Burn

The Cape Peninsula National Park is conducting a control burn in the Karbonkelberg / Sandy Bay area today, **Monday 14 May 2001**. This forms part of the programme to control invading alien plants in the area, aimed ultimately at reducing the risk of fire to people and property and restoring the biodiversity and ecological integrity of the area.

Much of the area concerned has been cleared of invading alien plants, mainly Rooikrans (*Acacia cyclops*). The burn will remove the remaining dry cut material that poses a fire risk and will at the same time kill off the alien plant seedlings and regrowth that is regenerating after the initial clearing. There will be a need to do further follow-up clearing of the area after the burn before the invading plants can be considered to be under control.

"Carrying out the burn safely and effectively is dependant on local weather conditions, and the decision to burn today was taken because prevailing wind, temperature and humidity conditions are just right," says Stephen Hulbert of the CPNP.

Preparations for the planned burn have been going on for weeks, with temporary fire breaks having been constructed with funding from the Santam / Cape Argus Ukuvuka: Operation Firestop Campaign, and every precaution has been taken to ensure that the control burn goes ahead safely. "Now that we have had the first substantial rains of the wet season the control burn can go ahead," says Andrew Brown of Ukuvuka.

"The area is unique and the management thereof is problematic, making the decision to burn a difficult one.

The lower northern and eastern slopes of the Karbonkelberg are very sandy and historically formed part of an exposed open dune system, that has subsequently been stabilized by the invading Rooikrans. With the sand stabilized, the development of property has since taken place.

"The problem with removing the vegetation cover is that it is likely that there will be some sand movement that may affect property on the edge of the mountain. Engineers from the City of Cape Town will assess the situation to identify possible threats to property after the fire, and are ready to put emergency slope stabilization measures in place should this be necessary.

"There are pieces of privately owned land jutting into the Karbonkelberg that are surrounded by state owned land under the management control of the Cape Peninsula National Park. This complicates the effective conservation management of the mountain as a unit considerably, including controlling invading alien plants and preparing for and undertaking controlled burning," says Hulbert.

"There were three uncontrolled fires on the Karbonkelberg during this last summer. While it is difficult to be absolutely certain, it is suspected that at least two of these fires were started from flares that were let off and which landed on the mountain. It is fortunate that the prevailing winds during these events carried the fires westwards and they were able to be extinguished before by the authorities before any lives or property were threatened, says Brown.

"Ironically one of these wildfires, that started on the hills above the Hout Bay Harbour and burnt out against the steep cliffs on the western side of the Karbonkelberg mountain overlooking the Atlantic, has actually made carrying out the planned control burn of the area cleared of invading alien vegetation a little easier.

"The authorities are urging the public to please stay well away from where the burn is taking place so as not to put themselves in danger or to cause traffic congestion that may interfere with the response time of the emergency

services.

"The burn will generate ash and soot that, depending on wind conditions, may affect residents surrounding the area in Hout Bay and Llandudno. They are advised to cover or move indoors anything that may be soiled, such as washing on the line," says Brown.

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