

ASP General Information

Electrical Safety & Compliance

Alert Number: GI24_20

10 September 2020

Subject: Total Fire Bans and Hot Work Requirements

During the summer months there is an increased risk of starting a fire when undertaking our activities. The Bushfire Danger Period this summer begins 1 September 2020 for Upper Hunter, Muswellbrook and Singleton LGAs, and 1 October for all other LGAs in the Ausgrid network area. The Bushfire Danger Period extends through to 31 March 2020; however, this may vary due to local conditions. Total Fire Bans can be declared during the Bushfire Danger Period. During a Total Fire Ban, no fire may be lit in the open unless in accordance with an approved exemption.

Always take care with hot works and address them in your Hazard Assessment Checklist.

Total Fire Bans

The Rural Fires Act 1997 prevents any work during a Total Fire Ban that involves the use of tools that employ certain classes of fire as part of the work being performed.

Specific exemptions may be given to those organisations that apply to do certain works under the *Gazetted Schedule of Standard Exemptions to Total Fire Bans* to Section 99 of the Rural Fires Act 1997.

Applications for exemptions must be submitted to the Commissioner, NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) in writing, with a written exemption received.

Detail included on the application form relating to the reason for the request, should specify that the ASP is completing work on behalf of a customer and not the utility (Ausgrid), as outlined below. This will prevent any confusion with RMS and Ausgrid's own exemption.

To undertake electrical infrastructure works during Total Fire Bans within the Ausgrid network distribution area in NSW, when, "Hot Works" using LP Gas Cylinders and Torch/Burners with a naked flame are used to carry out cable jointing and associated works.

Note, these works are completed on behalf of a customer and not the utility (Ausgrid), hence, do not meet the requirements as covered by class 6 of the *Gazetted Schedule of Standard Exemptions to Total Fire Bans*.

If granted, a copy of the written exemption must be forwarded to Ausgrid (ASPAuthorisations@Ausgrid.com.au) and be on site for the duration of the works (during a Total Fire Ban).

If ASPs do not have this exemption and works are undertaken during a Total Fire Ban that breach the Rural Fires Act, the works will be terminated and may be reported to the RFS for further action.

Hot Work

The NSW RFS can restrict the use of fire through Total Fire Bans in order to limit the number of fires that escape and threaten life, property and the environment.

While there is increased risk of causing a fire during a Total Fire Ban, fire risk still exists outside these periods. Additional precautions still apply with hot work whether or not a total fire ban is in force.

All fire risk issues must be carefully assessed as part of the daily hazard assessment process. It is extremely important to evaluate each work site and activity as the level of precautions necessary will vary.

General requirements for all hot work

1. Identify the risk

Identify the fire risk as part of the hazard assessment process. This must include an assessment and identification of:

- the fire danger rating on the day and any in force Total Fire Ban
- the type of hot work activities you would be undertaking, such as using a naked flame or generating sparks

- site specific circumstances such as proximity to combustible matter and site access
- external factors outside of the ASPs control, such as other high-risk activities underway or services present
- other unintentional sources of fire ignition such as:
 - driving a vehicle through long grass or operating equipment in proximity to vegetation
 - unattended fuel sources and fire risk at construction compounds out of work hours
 - discarding cigarette butts
 - operating switches or working on overhead mains which have the potential to generate arcing by-products
 - operating oil filled equipment or motors which get considerably hot during operation

2. Implement appropriate controls

Implement appropriate controls as part of the hazard assessment process. This should include:

- for hot work during a Total Fire Ban, complying with any exemptions you might have received
- ensuring you light and maintain fires in a manner which will prevent the escape of fire, sparks, incandescent or burning material
- checking equipment is fit for purpose
- supervising hot work activities for the entire time (i.e. never leave a naked flame unattended)
- scheduling hot work activities during the more favourable period of the day and week
- buffering hot work activities to be clear of combustible matter by at least three (3) metres
- isolating hot work activities using appropriate warning barriers and signage
- keeping adequate firefighting equipment immediately at hand

3. Re-evaluate the risk

Re-evaluate the risk throughout the day and amend the hazard assessment as required. Sudden changes in humidity, wind or extreme heat may change the fire risk throughout the day.

If there is any doubt as to whether urgent work cannot be carried out without risk of a fire igniting and spreading, activities should be suspended immediately, and your manager or supervisor contacted for further advice.

4. Report

If you witness a fire in progress or about to start, whether or not it is related to your activities, immediately contact the Fire Brigade on 000 (or 112 from a mobile phone) before informing your manager or supervisor.

Hot work during Total Fire Bans

A Total Fire Ban is declared for days when fires are likely to escape and be difficult to contain. This is caused by a combination of dry vegetation and hot, dry, windy weather.

The decision is generally made at around 5pm each afternoon during the bushfire danger period and the Total Fire Ban applies for the following day, starting from midnight and lasting 24 hours.

During a Total Fire Ban, no fire may be lit in the open unless in accordance with an approved exemption.

To identify the nearest local fire authority contact:

- Rural Fire Service Information line on 1800 679 737 or
- NSW Fire and Rescue on 9265 2999 or 000.

Note: Regardless of any exemptions, the ASP conducting the work is ultimately responsible for preventing the escape of fire, sparks or burning material and should consider reprogramming the works on a non-Total Fire Ban day for the safety of staff and community.

If you have any questions, please contact the Ausgrid Project Officers.

Ausgrid Electrical Safety & Compliance