

2/9/2018 1:53:11 PM

Reporter Comments

A prohibited Fire Season existed for this area which allowed gas barbecues to be used but suspension of certain operations that posed a fire risk.

Notice was given under section 56(1)(a) of the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act 2017 that a Prohibited Fire Season is declared from 0600, 23 December 2017 covering all areas within the Lakes District...

This effectively made it illegal to light fires including campfires, burn-offs and bonfires. This excluded:

- Enclosed outdoor fire places, pizza ovens utilising a chimney with a building permit
- Solid fuel barbecues with enclosed ash pan
- Any gas-fired cooking appliance.

Charred wood pieces, ash and embers gathered from a legal outdoor entertainment fire place had been first emptied into a metal ashcan by the occupants of a residential home. After a period of time these ashes had in turn been placed onto open ground near the rear of the property within a formed heap of cut vegetation, small tree clippings, cones and twigs. A short time later fire was discovered, ignited the pile of vegetation resulting in visible smoke and flame which was extinguished by garden hose. The pile remained doused with water from a garden sprinkler overnight. On Wednesday 3rd January additional vegetation was added to the pile. No sign of smoke was evident.

Fire Service Response:

I was requested to attend and assist with determining cause and origin of the fire. I arrived at the fire scene at 10:30 AM on Thursday 4 January 2018.

Discovery of fire:

At approximately 2:45PM on 3 January flames were observed spreading across the grass towards the western boundary fence line with the dry conditions assisting the rapid spread of fire across the ground through grass and other dry vegetation before accessing bramble bushes in the neighbouring ground. Attempts to extinguish this fire with extinguishers and later a garden hose were unsuccessful. While attempts to extinguish the flames was made another member of the family alerted emergency services of the fire.

Multiple calls were received reporting this event as smoke was quickly visible

adjacent to a residential area, from throughout the Wanaka basin .

Supposed Cause:

The actions of the owner of the property included disposing of the wood ash and embers involved then confining them to a metal container to allow them to cool before disposal. These actions are in line with advice provided by FENZ.

Their belief was that sufficient time had passed to allow the wood ashes to die out.

As per terms of reference:

While a total fire ban was in place, consideration was given towards contravening clauses within the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act 2017.

I cannot identify any particular clause under the Act through section 54 to 57 that is specific to this incident.

Section 61 Burning or smouldering substance in open air

(1) This section applies to a person who causes or allows a substance to burn or smoulder in open air and leaves the burning or smouldering substance in a way that increases the likelihood of harm or damage arising from the start or spread of fire.

(2) This clause refers to taking practical steps to reduce the consequence of damage arising from the start or spread of fire. Their actions upon discovery of fire were practical and believed to be sufficient to prevent further harm or damage. Clause (5) provides an ability to light a fire within a building or structure and that complies with any relevant requirement of the Building Act 2004 and the relevant district plan; in this event the fire was lit within a fireplace that met these requirements.

This fire is accidental. The fire was the result of live embers igniting vegetation cuttings and tree trimmings. This in turn ignited dry grass before spreading to scrub and bracken on neighbouring properties.

Fire spread was rapid and exacerbated by the extreme dry conditions and assisted by the slope and aspect of the land involved.

Michael Cahill

2/9/2018 1:59:23 PM

Reporter Comments

Photographs and additional documents are found on mpad.

Michael Cahill

2/9/2018 2:00:01 PM

Reporter Comments

FSO Requested at incident F2452708 on 03 Jan 2018 14:47

Action was taken and a full report was not created because: this was not requested

Action was taken and a full report was not created because: Accidental

Michael Cahill