



21 April 2021

## **SEBCID: Fire Protection Action & Advice**

Dear Neighbours,

Fire is a risk we are all aware is ever-present, given the environment and climate in which we live. The Table Mountain fire in recent days, however, has brought this risk even more to the forefront of our minds.

The Board of SEBCID does not, of course, profess to be fire-protection experts, but a number of steps have already been taken with the aim of improving fire safety in our area. The purpose of this e-mail is to endeavour to provide as much additional information as possible for property owners to safeguard their own homes and generally become more fire-protection aware.

### **What has SEBCID done?**

- On an ongoing basis, SEBCID's Environmental Management team is clearing certain invasive species, and removing biomass that may pose a fire-risk. In the latter part of 2020, the City of Cape Town's Invasive Species Department allocated a 6-man team to clear invasive species from the Baviaans River corridor and in the very near future a project to remove certain invasive trees from the river is due to commence; also funded by CCT.
- As we have reported previously, SEBCID has consulted the Cape Peninsula Fire Protection Association (CPFPA) regarding the specific risk in our area. A review of our mountainside perimeter and larger public open spaces was conducted and the removal of invasive trees (predominantly cluster pines and gums) was advocated. Two large pines were removed shortly after the assessment given the immediate risk they posed.
- CPFPA stressed the importance of SANParks adequately maintaining our firebreaks in accordance with requirements, and these were all attended to in recent months. However, concerns have also been raised about extensive invasive vegetation proliferating above the firebreaks and we will engage with SANParks regarding this as a matter of urgency.
- To address the various invasive trees which have been identified in our area as posing a fire and/or safety risk, SEBCID has consulted the Biosecurity Unit in the Department of

Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), which regulates all activities involving invasive alien species through the Alien and Invasive Species Regulations (2014) of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (2004).

- A list of the roughly 20 locations which are of immediate concern has been drawn up and will this week be sent to the Compliance Unit at DFFE. Some 75% of these are on privately-owned land. The remaining approximately 25% are on land owned by the City of Cape Town under the responsibility of the Recreation & Parks Department. SEBCID will work to ensure that Recreation & Parks takes the necessary steps to mitigate the risks posed by these trees but, as set out in its business plan, SEBCID does not have budget available to take some intermediary action if required.

### **What should property owners do?**

All property owners should take the time to ensure they are aware of both their legal responsibilities when it comes to reducing fire risk and the proactive steps they can take to reduce the risk of fire igniting or, more importantly, spreading.

To this end, we ask all property owners to please find the time to review the websites and attached documentation listed:

1. [National Veld and Forest Fire Act](#)
2. [City of Cape Town Fire Safety Guidance](#)
3. [Cape Peninsula Fire Protection Association](#)
4. Nemba AIS Regulations (2020)
5. Nemba Invasive Species List (2020)
6. Protecting Your Home
7. Firescaping Your Garden 1
8. Firescaping Your Garden 2

Property owners who might be contacted by Biosecurity South Africa with respect to trees of concern are asked to please take the action required to mitigate the risk.

A reminder that according to the policies and by-laws which govern CIDs, funding can only be allocated to top-up services in public spaces. Hence, SEBCID cannot assist with the cost of removing any trees or vegetation and private land-owners must take the necessary steps themselves. However, SEBCID can assist in securing optimal quotes from contractors with the necessary expertise, experience and insurance, to do the work.

In particular, it is anticipated that land-owners will be required to clear various species of pines, gums, Australian wattles, syringas, lantana, bugweed, Australian myrtle, and other species. As has been seen from the fires on the UCT campus and surroundings, palm trees are a particular fire-risk, and were responsible for some of the buildings being gutted.

In terms of the Regulations of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act of 1998, land-owners who do not take the necessary precautions to prevent fires from spreading from their properties, can be held liable for some or all of the damage caused on neighbouring

properties. This is a particularly onerous responsibility that should not be taken lightly. Useful guidelines are provided to fire-proof your houses.

Any resident with concerns about invasive species or vegetation posing a fire and/or safety risk, should not hesitate to contact the SEBCID board.

Kind regards

SEBCID Board