

PF Olsen Toolbox Safety Alert 83

Date: January 2025	Focus Group: Forest Operations
Topic: Fire Preparedness in Forestry Operations	Issued by: Ray Hook

Background: With hot, dry conditions setting in across parts of the country, the risk of wildfires in forestry operations is increasing. Fires can ignite from machinery, hot work, power lines, or human activity, and suppression efforts rely on early detection (mindfulness and watchfulness) and clear access for response teams.

Risk Awareness: Fire risks go beyond smoking or open flames. Sparks from chainsaws, grinders, or machinery striking rocks can ignite dry vegetation. Hot exhausts—especially from diesel particulate filters (DPFs)—can start fires in grass and slash. Power lines near work areas pose hazards if vegetation isn’t managed. Uncontrolled access also increases the risk of arson or accidental ignition. Wind and terrain can rapidly escalate a small fire beyond control.

Safe Behaviours: Since 98% of fires are caused by human activity, we all have a role in reducing fire risk. Review the following steps to see where you can make a difference:

Machinery and Hot Work:

- Clean machinery and equipment regularly to remove flammable debris.
- Check bearings and moving parts for heat-generating friction.
- Clean and maintain exhaust systems and monitor for excessive particulates.
- Restrict welding, grinding, and cutting to cooler mornings and wet down the area.
- Check and carry fire extinguishers, knapsack sprayers, and shovels.
- Keep sufficient water on-site to contain small fires immediately.

For Site Manager:

Print and complete the following:

1. Discuss with employees/operators:
2. Place on-site notice board or in file:

Site Manager: _____ **Date:** / /
(initials)



Site Management:

- Maintain clear access routes and ensure bridges are weight-rated for fire trucks.
- Lock gates or install barriers to discourage unauthorised access.
- Keep work areas free of dry grass, slash, and other flammable debris.
- Follow power line clearance regulations to prevent vegetation-related fires.
- Report vegetation risks—if something needs trimming or fixing and you can't manage it safely, don't ignore your instincts.

Emergency Readiness:

- Check the fire weather index before operating in dry conditions.
- Ensure all workers know how to report a fire and call 111 immediately.
- Regularly discuss fire response plans at toolbox safety meetings.
- Establish clear evacuation routes and muster points – these may need to change as fire risk increases.
- Co-operate with Fire and Emergency New Zealand and any one else in authority and follow any instructions to mitigate fire risks.



Helpful References:

NZFOA: [Rural Fire – A guide on how to manage risks](#)

[Forest Fire Risk Management Guidelines](#)

MPI: [Planning for Wildfire](#)