

Pigeon Valley Fire Newsletter #8 Saturday 16 February - Latest updates

Conditional Re-Entry and Restricted Access

All conditional and restricted access is cancelled for today, 16 February 2019. The situation will be reviewed this afternoon for tomorrow's access, and any updates posted on the Nelson Tasman Civil Defence website and Facebook page.

This includes:

- Eves Valley, Teapot Valley, Golden Hills residents
- Redwood Valley residents
- Wakefield residents

We remind those affected that the Civil Defence Centre at the New Life Church, Wensley Road, Richmond is open from 10-4 today and tomorrow, or longer if required.

The planning and assessment of any access is a complex process which takes the following factors into account:

- Current weather forecast
- Fire behaviour
- Availability of emergency personnel
- The condition of infrastructure within the fire damaged areas
- Geotechnical risks due to fire damage
- Damage around driveways affecting access to properties

The time it would take to evacuate the area versus the predicted speed of the fire is also a crucial consideration.

Our specialist teams are continually assessing each property. We appreciate people are extremely keen to get home but the situation is ever-changing and safety must come first.

While we are working at pace to get people back into their homes, residents who remain evacuated should plan on being away from home until at least Wednesday 20th February 2019, and possibly longer.

If and when you do re-enter your home, it's a good idea to take photos and call your insurance company to lodge a claim if necessary.

Fire update

The strong wind gusts experienced last night meant that drones were actively monitoring hotspots and crews were busy dealing with flare-ups. Conditions today are expected to continue to be challenging.

Today the 145 firefighters and 8 helicopters are working to manage any increased fire activity under the challenging wind conditions. Trees affected by the fire that have a risk of falling continue to be a concern and specialist assessors are on the ground today to address this issue. This is likely to take some time to due to the high risk involved in felling the fire-damaged trees. Machinery will be used in some instances as it is too dangerous for many trees to be felled manually.

The current fire perimeter is sitting around 35km, covering around 2330 ha. Please remember there is a total fire ban in place throughout the region.



Weather forecast

Today's weather has resulted in some challenging conditions for fire fighters. Southwest winds are predicted to swing to northwest this afternoon with gusts of up to 55km/h. It's important to note that the dynamic wind conditions, and the remaining tree foliage in Teapot Valley and the western side of Redwood Valley presents a risk of flare-ups. This has the potential for people to see increased levels of smoke. If at any time you are concerned about this please dial 111.

Sunday's forecast is for ongoing southwest winds in the morning, becoming northeast in the afternoon up to around 10 km/h with wind gusts up to 30 km/h in the afternoon. The expected temperature high is 22-23C and daytime humidity 50-55%.

Public Meeting

A public meeting and drop-in-session will be held tomorrow Sunday 17 February between 1:30pm - 3:30pm at the Hope Community Church. This session will provide an opportunity to hear the latest fire updates and to talk one-on-one to representatives from Civil Defence and Emergency, Fire and Emergency New Zealand, Police, and other supporting agencies

Community Fire Relief Concert

On Sunday 17 February from 4.30 at Saxton Field, the world famous New Zealand Army Band, will perform at the Richmond Rotary Club Fire Relief Concert. Entry to the concert is free and all donations collected will go towards the Tasman District Council Mayoral Disaster Relief Fund. So bring a blanket, some shade, food and drinks along with your family and friends and enjoy the music and time together. Come early to get a good spot!

We're watching the weather very carefully

Civil Defence teams and Fire and Emergency New Zealand are monitoring a comprehensive set of weather resources. This information helps FENZ personnel decide on aspects of fire management.

They use information from three weather stations, our teams of field observers on the fire ground, NIWA and independent meteorologists to help inform their approach.

As the temperature rises during the day, and any changes in wind direction or intensity, increase the potential for flare ups or changes to the fire area. By keeping a close eye on the weather conditions we can make sure we have our fire crews in the right places to respond.

Further Evacuations

Remember: if you are required to leave your home again, or you choose to self-evacuate, it is really important that you register with Civil Defence. You can either go to the Civil Defence Centre at the New Life Church, 85 Wensley Road, Richmond between 10am - 4pm on Saturday and Sunday, or phone 03 543 8400.

Animal welfare

Nelson Tasman Civil Defence have announced that restricted residential access to fire-affected valleys today (16 February) has been cancelled.

High winds pose too much of a risk to allow people into the area – including MPI animal welfare staff. This also means that planned conditional re-entry for the remaining Pigeon Valley Road residents, (including Sharp Road) has been cancelled today.

Fires present unique challenges relating to cordons and access to properties. Animal welfare is a serious matter but preserving human life is always the top priority. It's not possible for MPI to go into areas beyond the cordon for individual cases, unless they are extreme animal welfare situations and it's safe for our staff to do so.

The animals in these areas were last fed yesterday and will be fine for 2-3 days if necessary, as long as they have access to water.

MPI staff are working hard to ensure the welfare of animals in the Tasman region.

When it becomes safe for us to enter, MPI will coordinate our animal welfare staff and vets will move through the area to assess any immediate animal welfare needs.

Evacuated animals are still being cared for at the Richmond A&P Showgrounds, where there is housing, food and water. Animals of any size can be brought directly to the Showgrounds to be looked after by the amazing team of volunteers.

If you need any support regarding the welfare of your animals please call MPI on 0800 008 333, Option 4.

Further information is available on MPI's website

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/protection-and-response/responding/adverse-events/tasman-district-fires-2019/>

Federated Farmers feed line is distributing feed that has been donated. Anyone affected by fires and needing feed for animals can register for this help: Phone 0800 327 646 (option 2). Availability is dependent on donations. Priority will be given to farms who rely on farm income for their living and have been affected by fire.

It's obviously still a very stressful time for those who cannot yet return home, and we urge people to access the support available. This includes the Rural Support Trust, the Federated Farmer's Feedline and NAIT. You can also contact Rural Support Trust: for a free, confidential chat on 0800 787 254.

MPI has been and will continue to work closely with the Tasman District Council, growers and farmers regarding the effects of the drought. It is also critical that stock levels on properties are appropriate to the water restrictions in place. Farmers and lifestyle block owners need to be making active destocking decisions.

General information for affected people

Wakefield Health Centre and Wakefield Pharmacy have now resumed normal hours of operation.

Drinking water contamination information

If you are on a Tasman District Council reticulated water supply, and are returning to evacuated areas, the Wakefield, Redwood Valley and Hope/Brightwater reticulated water supplies are all currently operational.

If you are on a roof water tank supply, any ash and debris that may have been deposited on your roof from the fire should be removed, and the first flush of water following the next rainfall should not be collected. Only reconnect the tank after the roof area has been checked and cleared.

If material has been washed into the tank in sufficient quantities to affect smell, taste or appearance of rainwater, do not drink the water.

Rainwater in tanks that have not been affected by ash and debris, and has no taint or odour can still be used for normal purposes.

Machinery use and exemptions

A process has been agreed to allow exemptions for contractors and businesses following the ban on use of machinery.

Forestry companies and contractors will be asked to sign a declaration confirming they would follow established operational protocols on using equipment in extreme fire risk conditions.

Exemptions will be considered only for organisations covered by the Health and Safety at Work Act. Businesses wanting to apply for an exemption, should call the Tasman District Council on 03 543 8400 (this applies to businesses in the Nelson area as well). You can find out more about this at www.nelsontasmancivildefence.co.nz.

Health and wellbeing advice

Coping with stress and anxiety: Anxiety is very common during an emergency event such as an uncontrolled fire. This is a normal response to a very stressful situation. Talking to people and helping others can be both therapeutic and useful.

Getting a good night's sleep is also important. There are good tips on this website:

<https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/healthy-living/sleep/sleep-tips/>

Iwi Liaison

If you have iwi specific requests for information, support or help around the fires, please contact iwi@nelsontasmandem.govt.nz.

Health navigators

For help getting healthcare, Nelson Bays Primary Health health navigators are available to help connect you to health service

- Local support (8am - 5pm): 0800 627 401
- Email healthsupport@nbph.org.nz
- If you need help accessing a GP please contact Sally.Tohill@nbph.org.nz PH: 03-5437841
- Healthline (24 hours): 0800 611 116
- Free-call or text 1737 to talk to a trained counsellor
- in an emergency, call 111

Please refer to the Nelson Marlborough Health website for advice about smoke exposure, helping children to cope and more.

<https://www.nmdhb.govt.nz/nmdhb-news-and-notices/pigeon-valley-forest-fire-update/2019>



Financial Assistance

You and your family may be able to get a Civil Defence payment. Work and Income may be able to help cover the costs of urgent or unexpected costs (e.g. petrol, food, urgent living expenses, etc.) They are also able to provide help with accommodation costs when people are staying with friends or family.

As of Wednesday 13 February 2019, the Ministry of Social Development had processed 432 Civil Defence payments.

Contact Work & Income on 0800 779 997 if you would like help, aren't sure if you can get help, are struggling to support yourself or your family or would like more information.

More information on who and what help you can get is available on the Work and Income Civil Defence webpage : www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-zbenefits/civil-defence-payment.html

Mayoral Disaster Relief Fund

Applications for grants from the Mayoral Disaster Relief Fund will open seven days after the Civil Defence State of Emergency is lifted. The fund is intending to provide one-off relief grants to residents, property owners and business owners affected by the Pigeon Valley fire.

The grants will make a contribution and are likely to cover damage or hardship caused by the fire that are not generally covered by insurance or emergency funding, or grants or allowances from other agencies or similar sources. At this stage the criteria is still being finalised.

As of Friday afternoon the fund totalled about \$300,000, including Government contributions. Approximately \$130,000 had been donated directly by the community.

All applications must be made online, and assistance will be provided to anyone who needs help with the application process. The Tasman District Council website will have more information on criteria and applications as soon as it is finalised.

Contact details and where to find the most up to date information about the fires, evacuation and the emergency response:

- The Nelson Tasman Civil Defence website: www.nelsoctasmancivildefence.co.nz/news
- The Nelson Tasman Civil Defence Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/nelsoctasmancivildefenceandemergencymanagement>
- The NZTA traffic pages (for information about road closures): <http://www.journeys.nzta.govt.nz/traffic/regions/10>
- Brian FM is broadcasting Civil Defence information: 106.2 FM
- Parents are advised by the Ministry of Education to stay in touch with your child's school, via the school website or Facebook page. Please check for any changes to the normal routine and bus routes.
- The Ministry of Social Development can advise on financial support: 0800 779 997



Sharing this update

Civil Defence is here to help, if you think there are other topics we need to cover in this newsletter let us know.

Hard copies of this newsletter will be available at the Tasman District Council Customer Service Centre and at each end of the Wakefield cordon.

If you have family or friends that cannot access a computer, please share this information with them. Remember, it is ok to ask for help. If you need help and you're not sure who to ask, call Tasman District Council on 03 543 8400 (24 Hours).

