

MEDIA RELEASE - 19 April 2002

UKUVUKA : OPERATION FIRESTOP

SIMONS TOWN FIRE

Joint statement by the Cape Peninsula National Park and the Fire Services of the City of Cape Town.

There is no "row over runaway blaze" (headline in the Cape Argus of Friday 19 April 2002).

This is the season for control burns and a successful control burn took place on Trappieskop in Kalk Bay / Clovelly on Monday when the windless conditions were ideal. However, the Miller's Point fire was not caused by a control burn. Park Manager Howard Langley said "At no time was a control burn contemplated by the Cape Peninsula National Park in the Millers Point area. Nor is one planned for the foreseeable future. The Park is not responsible for the fire in Simons Town on 18 April 2002. The statement by Mr Peter Muller Head of the South Peninsula Administration Fire Department was based on incorrect information that he had received."

Both parties confirmed that there is no 'row' between them as reported in the press this morning. They are jointly addressing the incident. The Park, the City and the Fire Services have been working together in the past 18 months and have further developed a very constructive working relationship and will continue to do so into the future.

As good corporate citizens, as well as providers of services and amenities to the community, best practices are important to both the Park and the City of Cape Town's Fire Service. Both parties have already examined the incident and will extract the lessons learned and address areas that need improvement as soon as possible. These discussions will include representatives of the Santam/Cape Argus Operation Firestop Campaign.

"No fire is unimportant and every fire alert will be followed up. That fires is every citizen's responsibility has been re-emphasized" say Peter Muller, Head South Peninsula Administration Fire Department.

"Yesterday's fire was intensified by the density of the invading alien plants in the area" reports Anban Padyachee, Extension Officer of the Santam/Cape Argus Operation Firestop, from the action scene. "The property where the wooden cottage burnt down, was heavily infested by 2 metre high pines and even larger Rooikrans and Port Jackson. The property and surrounding area is privately owned and therefore not the responsibility of the Park or the City to clear. It once again highlights the necessity for private landowners and citizens to take precaution on and around their properties by clearing invading alien plants and making sure that firebreaks are in place in areas that may be vulnerable to fire."

"After all the information given to the public regarding the danger of fire and invading alien plants, this fire is the inevitable consequence of not taking action. The next fire hazard is already growing" says Dr Guy Preston National Leader of the Working for Water Programme of the Department of Water and Forestry.

After the devastating fires on the Cape Peninsula in 2000, the City of Cape Town and the Cape Peninsula National Park have been actively implementing an invading alien clearing and firebreak preparation strategy around the Table Mountain Chain. The short-term private public sector partnership, the Santam Cape Argus Ukuvuka Operation Firestop Campaign has assisted.

Of the new Fire belt plan for the Peninsula, the following are completed as at January 2002:

Of all fire belts needed, 31% fall on Privately owned land. Only 28% of these fire belts are in place.

- 80,7% of the CPNP's [56,3km] fire belts
- 85% of fire belts on state and parastatal land
- 43%, of the City of Cape Town's 17,5km

"At this time the cause of the fire remains unknown. Fire Fighters remain on standby and will continue to do so until there is no further danger and the fire is completely extinguished" says Peter Muller of the South

Peninsula Administration Fire Department.

The fire that broke out yesterday afternoon on the slopes behind Simons Town has brought to the fore the importance of

1. clear and open communication
2. the responsibility of individual property owners to keep their properties clear of invading alien plants.

Background information re press release

Please concentrate on the clearing and fire proofing and the fact that it is the responsibility of Private Landowners to clear invading alien plants on their land. There is legislation in this regard. This is a huge problem not only in the Cape Peninsula but nationally. 80% of all conservation-worthy land in South Africa is privately owned. Aliens create a higher fuel load than the local Fynbos, and while both are " Born to burn", the 2000 fires proved that fires fuelled by invading alien plants are more intense.

Facts: Our Campaign Coordinator, Val Charlton alerted local residents at an NGO meeting in 2001 about the urgency to clear their property from invading alien plants. The property burnt down is addressed in the press release. Mrs J Hardie, who manages the Rocklands Campsite Trust, cleared the property from invading alien plants and she has had no damage. Had she not cleared they may have possibly also lost all their accommodation. Through requesting advise from CPNP she has built up a good working relationship with the Park an has publicly commended their willingness to assist and advise.

Should any further information be required, please call me on 082 555 4055

Yours sincerely

RIANA SCHOLTZ
COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR
Santam/ Cape Argus Ukuvuka Operation Firestop