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No fires allowed in Southland

The total fire ban remains in place in Southland, despite last week's rain.

Southern Rural Fire Authority Principal Rural Fire Officer Mike Grant said it is necessary to keep the fire ban going as the province is still very dry.

“The bottom line is there was not sufficient rain to lift the ban. We had isolated downpours but it was not widespread enough to make a difference,” Mr Grant said. “We had light showers for a few days but much of the water evaporated. There are tinges of green in places, but not much.”

One of the biggest danger areas is on the fringes of paddocks or on roadsides where there is rank grass. The forecast is for the dry weather to continue and the potential is there for a bad fire, he said.

Drought indicators for the Manapouri and Garston areas were high and the rest of the province was on line with 2004 levels, which was particularly dry. Several large fires happened that year.

Mr Grant said it is unfortunate that some people are ignoring the ban.

“There's been blatant burning of rubbish and offal holes and there were in excess of 40 vegetation fires in January, with five out of control,” he said. “It is lucky there wasn't much wind at those times otherwise the fires could have caused a lot of damage.”

The Rural Fire Authority and the Fire Service will continue to extinguish all fires and charge all the associated costs, which could be several thousands of dollars, to the property owner. “We may have to look at prosecution, too,” Mr Grant said.

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For further information please contact:

Mike Grant
Principal Rural Fire Officer
Southern Rural Fire Authority
PO Box 903, Invercargill
Ph (0800) 732 732
Fax (0800) 732 329

<mailto:mike.grant@sfd.org.nz>
www.sfd.org.nz