

# ITGA calls for more vigilance to minimise forest fire damage

Donal Whelan, technical director of the Irish Timber Growers Association, outlines the need to take precautions to avoid forest fires



**A**lthough rain has returned after a very dry February, we are facing into the fire danger period.

February until late April is a period of high fire risk as many types of ground vegetation are still dead and dry but devastating forest fires can occur throughout the year.

ITGA calls on the public to report land fires – even when small – to the fire brigade as soon as they occur. The speed of response is critical and often it's best not to assume that someone else will make that call.

Forest fires represent a significant personal economic loss to woodland owners, with knock-on effects for their families and local communities.

Forest fires also release significant amounts of smoke pollution and carbon into the atmosphere, with major impli-



**Forest fires cause major economic loss to woodland owners as well as damage to forests, wildlife, flora and natural habitats.** \ Coillte

cations for air quality and for those who suffer from respiratory illnesses, not to mention the catastrophic effects on wildlife, flora and natural habitats.

This month, Met Éireann launched its new fire weather index, meteograms. These are presented for regions around the country and are available on the Met Éireann website. They are updated daily and display the fire weather index, fine fuel moisture code, and initial spread index, all important components of fire risk.

The ITGA recommends that forest owners and managers check and update their fire control plans, fire prevention measures and contingencies such as insurance, access, water points and fire response plan with relevant emergency contact numbers and other details.

While growing vegetation cannot be burnt between 1 March and 31 August, the ITGA reminds landowners that outside of this period it is prohibited to burn any vegetation within one mile of a wood, without prior notification to the gardai and the owner of the wood.

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