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SOUTH III



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PREVENTION, PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TO NATURAL AND MAN-MADE  
DISASTERS IN THE SOUTHERN NEIGHBORHOOD (PPRD SOUTH 3)

# | Forest fire risks

Guidelines for a directive

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# FOREWORD

## FOREST FIRE



*Forest fire is the natural risk to which the most Mediterranean basin countries are currently exposed. For some years now, climate change has tended to extend the scope of risk, and also the criticality of fires, to produce uncontrollable disasters.*

The fight against forest fires therefore requires adopting a functional and operational response method that follows a precise, logical and customised framework.

Above all, it is necessary to define the notion of “forest fire”, because this term doesn’t only refer to fires in so-called “forest” areas. In fact, the countries of the Mediterranean basin are covered not only by forests, but also by vast areas of combustible vegetation such as maquis, heath and brush, which are extremely sensitive to fires.

Accordingly, by convention we define a forest fire as a fire in a natural setting that directly threatens an area of more than one hectare of continuous and homogeneous vegetation.

The aim of this document is not only to propose a methodology that makes it possible to encompass all of the distinct phases in the development of a national set of principles for the management and prevention of forest fires, but also to provide documents, in the form of annexed files, containing performance or result indicators, and which summarise the main actions to be implemented.

Therefore this is a concise document, supplemented with annexes that will be adapted locally to the organisational, cultural and societal specifics of each country or region concerned.

These guidelines should be considered as a tool for forest fire risk response strategy managers,

and for operational managers responsible for implementing this strategy. Details on tactical and technical execution may be the subject of an additional customised guide.

The challenges are of several kinds and primarily concern populations affected by forest fire risks. In addition to this human aspect, there is also economic risk, which more specifically concerns property and infrastructure, and finally environmental risk, which has been widely discussed in light of ecological disasters that have occurred both in terms of biodiversity and release into the atmosphere of pollutant emissions.

## **| Populations**

Personal protection is the first priority in civil protection actions. The preservation of human life is therefore always the main concern of the authority in charge of the emergency services. The behaviour of different types of population in the face of a fire must be taken into account in the action of the emergency services and in the ideas for manoeuvre that are conceived of, chosen and implemented during operations.

## **| Property and infrastructure**

The protection of property and infrastructure is the second concern of the emergency services in terms of civil protection actions. A distinction must be made between critical infrastructure, strategic infrastructure and private property. Nor should we neglect the domino effects that can be caused by the total or partial alteration of critical infrastructure.

## **| Environment**

Environmental protection is the third priority for emergency services. It concerns the protection of wooded areas, as well as the preservation of biodiversity and the limitation of greenhouse gas emissions. These gases are produced during forest fires and contribute greatly to global warming. A fifth of greenhouse gas emissions from human activities come from the destruction of forests by fires. Forest fires also lead to the loss of a considerable number of animal and plant species that are undermining our global fight against global warming. These repeated losses also lead to rapid soil impoverishment and mineralisation.

# FOREWORD

## AND POLITICAL ACCEPTABILITY

### **Economic**

The costs incurred by forest fires, as well as by the actions undertaken by regional and/or national authorities, represent a significant burden on the economies of States. The implementation of a set of principles essentially focused on combating the problem cannot be accepted indefinitely. It is therefore necessary to find a way to reduce this cost by making necessary adjustments, while maintaining operational efficiency.

### **Societal**

In many countries, forest fires have in recent years led to the direct or indirect deaths of too many people who have experienced horrific deaths. Our modern societies are no longer willing to pay such a heavy price for a natural risk whose effects have been known for decades. Measures to protect populations must therefore be adapted by the authorities and they must involve citizens as the first link in the chain regarding their own safety.

### **Cross-border and/or international**

Natural risks know no boundaries and therefore cooperation measures must be put in place. The spread of large fires from one country to another may cause political tensions.