

**IMPROVING
FIRE PREVENTION
THROUGH
CAUSE
DETERMINATION**

**If the cause of a fire is known,
there is an increased chance of
preventing future fires of a similar
nature, as well as having
information to confront and
convict suspects in cases of
malicious acts**

Through the implementation of proper techniques and procedures by qualified and experienced investigators, it is possible in about 90% of cases to accurately determine the cause of a veldfire





It is concerning that numerous fire managers often do not believe that the origin and cause, especially for large fires, can be determined. And even if the cause is able to be determined, the culprit will never be caught.



**TWO OF THE MAJOR FACTORS
THAT HINDER A SUCCESSFUL
INVESTIGATION ARE:**

- 1. NOT REQUESTING ONE AT AN
EARLY STAGE, AND**
- 2. FIRE FIGHTERS DAMAGING
THE GENERAL ORIGIN**

**THREE EXAMPLES WHERE THE
CAUSE OF VELDFIRES WERE
INCORRECTLY DETERMINED BY
FIRST RESPONDERS**

EXAMPLE 1

**Location: Red Hill Rd, South Peninsula.
January 2009**

Approx. time of ignition: 02h30

**Reported cause by responders:
Accidental discarding of cigarette**

Actual cause: Malicious. Handheld flare



EXAMPLE 2

**Location: Plateau Rd, South Peninsula.
February 2009**

Approx. time of ignition: 00h30

**Reported cause by responders:
Accidental discarding of cigarette**

Actual cause: Malicious. Book matches



EXAMPLE 3

**Location: Close to Smitswinkel Bay,
South Peninsula. February 2013**

Approx. time of ignition: 06h00

**Reported cause by responders:
Homeless people in the bushes**

Actual cause: Fireworks



IN THE CAPE PENINSULA, THE GENERAL CAUSES OF VELDFIRES ARE :

- Approx 30% : Homeless people**
- Approx 30% : Children**
- Approx 30% : Improperly
extinguished fires**
- 10% : Accidental & malicious**

Closing statements

- 1. Unless the true causes of fires are determined, costly efforts will continue to be misdirected and wasted. An examples is the assumption that cigarettes are causing most roadside fires.**
- 2. I say with confidence that the majority of veldfires in the Cape Peninsula that start after 18h30 are not accidental cigarette ignitions. This is based on studies being undertaken and investigations to date. Unless these fires are properly investigated and evidence collected, whoever is setting them will continue to do so without being caught.**

3. It is strongly recommended that fire perimeters be checked with a low-cost digital thermometer to locate possible hidden embers so as to avoid re-kindled fires. *Enviro Wildfire Services* would be happy to provide these to Fish Hoek, Simonstown and Lakeside fire stations as we have with simplex two-way radios.

4. It is proposed that the matter of homeless people and woodcutters that use open fires on the urban edge be addressed.

5. If more veldfire “cause investigations” were undertaken by qualified and experienced investigators, it would be possible to:

- a) Improve fire prevention by identifying the true causes of the fires, and**
- b) Increase the chances of apprehending those that are maliciously setting them**

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Enviro Wildfire Services