



Dwellingup district clerical officer Lisa Craig takes relative humidity measurements with a thermo-hygro graph. Among Lisa's other duties is that of weekend weather watcher in the fire season. Photo by Tammie Reid.

Coming 'weather' you're ready or not

Story and photo by Tammie Reid

THE weather is integral to much of the work we do in CALM and monitoring the temperature, wind and rain is carried out at many CALM work centres.

This monitoring, generally by the administrative staff, is carried out twice a day all year round but at some centres during the fire season, it can be as often as four times a day.

This year, some interesting statistics and trends have been noted by the people responsible for taking the daily measurements.

In the fire season, the weather dominates most conversations; it is the first topic discussed in the morning and the last at the close of business each day, as we work out who is needed to be on fire duty or on call.

At Dwellingup, the administration staff have noted a change in the nature of inquiries from the public about camping in Lane Poole Reserve and the threat of fires.

Clerical assistant Lisa Craig says that most people this year were ringing before leaving home to check whether or not they could light a fire when camping in the Murray Valley.

"We get about 12 calls a day, whereas last year calls averaged one a week," she says.

"More people now plan their trips with fire safety in mind and they're bringing a gas stove with them rather than firewood."

Lane Poole ranger-in-charge John Hanel agrees. "It's been a dry season,

with the Murray River still just trickling through the valley, and as a consequence, campers this year appear to be more aware of the potential for a bush fire disaster," he says.

"Interestingly, our statistics of wild fires due to escapes from campfires are also down this year."

Lisa said that this had been one of the driest seasons and was reflected in the Soil Dryness Index (SDI) graphs (see below).

"Rainfall has been 40 per cent less than most years, and most of that fell in June and July," she said.

"Because it dried out so quickly, the SDI soon became too high to complete the spring hazard reduction burning program.

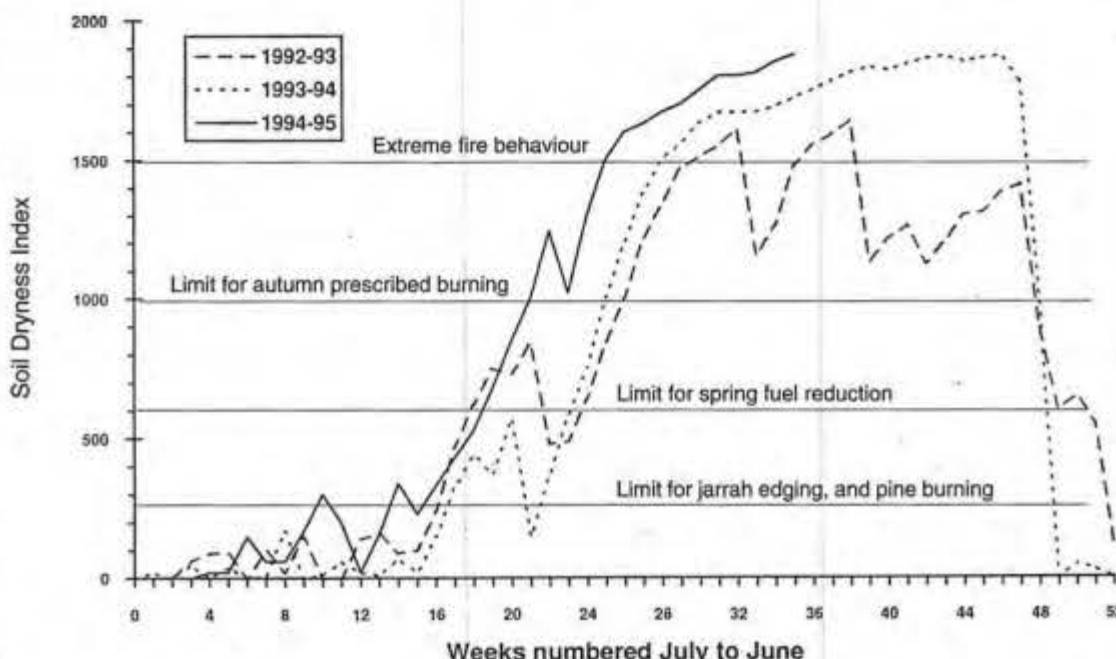
"Now the SDI will stay in the extreme rating range until we get enough of a downpour to thor-

oughly saturate the soil."

Dwellingup and Pemberton district offices are the only on-line weather stations linking the Bureau of Meteorology and CALM.

The main weather work centres are Wanneroo, Mundaring, Dwellingup, Kirup, Margaret River, Pemberton and Walpole, but all district offices are part of the weather reporting network in the fire season and they fax or phone weather readings to help fine tune the Bureau's daily forecasts.

These centres begin recording their observations at 7.00 am; the readings are used by the Bureau to update their 6.00 am forecast for issue in the 7.45 am report, on which CALM centres base the day's despatch and works programs.





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