

## **WILDFIRES - KEY MESSAGES**

- **What are wildfires?**
- **Wildfires are not natural**
- **Wildfires put lives at risk**
- **Wildfires cost everyone**
- **Wildfires destroy our surroundings**
- **Wildfires are illegal**

### **What are wildfires?**

- Wildfires are unplanned or uncontrolled fires in the countryside or open areas in towns and cities. They often spread quickly through plants that are dry and easy to burn such as gorse and heather.
- Wildfires can quickly get out of control, spread rapidly, change direction and are extremely dangerous.
- Fire can be used by landowners to improve grazing if carefully planned, properly managed, in the right conditions and at the right time of year (1 September to 14 April). These are not wildfires – unless they get out of control.

### **Wildfires are not natural**

- They are started by humans - sometimes deliberately. This is called arson
- Sometimes caused by people being careless – for example cigarettes, campfires or barbeques

### **Wildfires put lives at risk** - they could result in tragedy

- Those in the line of the fire are at risk, including those setting the fire, walking or camping and local residents.
- They endanger the firefighters who tackle them.
- They deprive communities of quick access to emergency services which may be essential for house fires or road traffic collisions where every second could make the difference between life and death.

**Wildfires cost everyone** – the whole community as well as businesses that provide much needed employment. Between 2005 and 2010 **£35 million** was spent on fighting wildfires alone.

- They require special equipment and a lot of people to fight them.
- They can destroy valuable timber.
- They can increase the treatment costs for drinking water
- Farmers may lose livestock or grazing lands.
- Fires and their blackened remains can put off visitors to some of our most popular places and in turn damage local businesses.

**Wildfires destroy our surroundings** – how they look and the wildlife in them

- Nests and the young of birds that nest on the ground are destroyed.
- Mammals such as red squirrel lose their forest homes.
- Small animals like the common lizard are killed.
- Landscapes are less attractive until they recover.
- They damage peatland that is important as a carbon store to combat climate change.
- The countryside is less enjoyable for people to visit.

**Wildfires are illegal**

- Deliberate setting of wildfires is a criminal offence.
- Controlled burns are a management tool and should not be confused with wildfires.

**Wildfires - put a STOP to them**

**If you are a landowner:**

- Follow guidance from DARD, UFU and NIFRS on controlled burning to manage vegetation, follow codes of practice and adhere to all legal requirements including notifications.

**If you are a parent or if you work with young people:**

- Make sure that they understand that fire can be extremely dangerous and unpredictable.
- Explain how serious the consequences are of starting a fire.
- Make sure that they know it is illegal.
- “Lighting a wee fire can be a **BIG** mistake”

**If you are in the countryside:**

- Extinguish cigarettes and other smoking materials properly

- Never throw cigarette ends out of car windows..
- Only use barbecues in fesignated areas and never leave them unattended.
- Ensure that barbecues are fully extinguished and cold before disposing of their contents
- Avoid using open fires in the countryside.
- Do not leave bottles or glass behind; sunlight shining through glass can start a fire.

**If you see a fire:**

- If you see a fire in the countryside, report it immediately to the Fire & Rescue Service.
- Do not attempt to tackle fires that cannot be put out with a bucket of water.
- Leave the area as soon as possible.
- If you see someone setting fires, report it to the PSNI.