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Countries need to pay more attention to managing fires near forests – UN and partners



Local communities should be trained in how to prevent fires in forests and adjacent areas throughout the whole year

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A United Nations-backed partnership is calling on countries to pay more attention to activities such as burning rubbish or agricultural waste on lands bordering forests to prevent the 95 per cent of wildfires that originate from human activities in forests and adjacent areas.

The call comes from the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), which consists of 14 international organizations and secretariats, including the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), comes amid an increase in wildfires in many countries.

“In many cases the fire starts on agricultural or pasture lands and spreads quickly on nearby forests,” [said](#) Pieter van Lierop, an FAO expert on forest fire management.

“When people continue to burn rubbish and agricultural waste, clear lands by burning vegetation for agricultural or development purposes, or burn pastures to allow grass to sustain its high productivity, there is always a danger of large-scale vegetation and forest fires particularly under dry and hot weather conditions,” he added.

Mr. van Lierop said that there are practical things that can be done to reduce the risks of fire escaping from agricultural areas. They include burning agricultural waste early in the dry season before the surrounding landscape gets too dry and avoiding burning during high winds.

The CPF also advocates more integrated approaches to fire management, including not only fire suppression but also fire prevention, controlled burning, early warning and preparedness – all of which increase investment.

“As most fires are started by people, countries should invest more in integrated fire-management strategies, especially in the often overlooked area of prevention,” said Mr. van Lierop.

“Local communities should be trained on how to prevent vegetation fires throughout the whole year and not only during the fire season. More attention should also be given to monitoring wildfire carbon gas emissions as a potential contributor to climate change,” he said.

FAO is now forming a multi-donor trust fund programme to respond better to member countries’ demands.

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