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Dry grass a big fire hazard

Tall growth should be cut in November-December, before the advent of summer, experts advise in the wake of the Aero India fire.



Nina C George, DH News Service, Bengaluru, FEB 27 2019, 19:49PM IST | UPDATED: FEB 28 2019, 00:44AM IST



About 300 cars were gutted when a fire raged through dry grass at the Aero India parking area last Saturday.

Firefighters say a combination of dry grass and strong winds helped the fire at the Aero India parking spread quickly.

About 300 cars were gutted in the unprecedented fire on February 23. A day later, another fire was reported at the Jarakabande state forest near February 24.

Dr T V Ramachandra of the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science says deforestation and the decline in cattle population are concerns in summer.

“Earlier, the dry grass used to be cut to feed cattle. People don’t cut grass anymore because of the decline in cattle population,” he told Metrolife.

Last week’s big fire at Bandipur is a classic example of what happens in the wake of deforestation.

“When people remove or encroach on parts of the forest, there tends to be an invasion by species not native, and they grow wildly because of the conducive environment,” he explains.

Such fires are almost always avoidable, in his opinion. “Digging trenches in forests where there is dry grass prevents the fire from spreading and also prevents people from entering the forest,” he says.

Places where dry grass is rampant in the city must be identified well ahead of the summer, says environmentalist Dr A N Yellappa Reddy. “Highly inflammable areas must be spotted in November-December and the grass cut.

It is not just forested lands, even private sites where dry grass has grown must be attended to,” he says.

The BBMP has the authority to issue notices to private owners if their sites are overgrown with grass. Or the BBMP could do clear it and recover the money from the owners, he says. Forest officials say they put in consistent efforts to spot areas with dry grass and cut it down.

What citizens can do

Dipika Bajpai, deputy conservator of forests (Bangalore Urban), says, “Grass is an annual crop we make it a point to cut dry grass and burn it before summer every year. This is done in the early morning or late evening, and we burn the cut grass.”

City parking areas must be regularly cleaned and dry trees cut as a precautionary measure against fire ahead of summer, she suggests. “Grass must never be allowed to grow. If it is three or four feet tall, it must immediately be cut and burnt,” she says. Dipika says people must ensure their neighbourhood is free of dry grass and clear empty sites with dry leaves and grass regularly. “It is also not advisable to burn garbage at this time because the strong winds could cause the fire to spread. People should stop the burning of garbage,” she says.



A weed cutter is used to cut the dry grass. The collected grass is burnt in a trench to form a break line.