

Bernie Project Delivery & Evaluation

Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff
Unitary Authority Area 2013

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an evaluation of the 2013 Bernie project in the Unitary Authorities of Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff.

Bernie is the outcome of the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service social marketing project which aims to reduce deliberate grass fires in South Wales attempting to change behaviours and social acceptance of deliberate grass fires in the Unitary Authority areas aforementioned.

This report provides an overview of the 2013 project across the four unitary authorities which were chosen following analysis of historical data as the areas with the highest levels of deliberate grass fires. The report will identify the outcomes of this year's project and also outline recommendations for future delivery of the project.

The evaluation encompasses both quantitative and qualitative research with key stakeholders including:

- Comparison deliberate grass fire incidents
- The opportunity for all partner agencies to feedback
- Comparison of crime figures in specific areas

A key variable affecting the occurrence of deliberate grass fires are weather conditions. In 2012 South Wales experienced unseasonal inclement weather conditions throughout the month of April following a very dry March, the previous year 2011, was one of the hottest and driest April on record coinciding with the school holidays whereas for 2013 South Wales experienced dry weather during the months of March and April. Historical data has demonstrated that dry weather conditions during the Easter period result in a significant increase in deliberate grass fire incidents and this was the case for this year.

Statistical evidence has indicated that South Wales Fire and Rescue Service had 652 fires during 2013 project.

During the Easter holiday period South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and Partners organised and delivered a range of activities resulting in 164 young people aged between 11-18 being engaged in the diversionary activities which were held over 20 days during the 3 week school holiday period.

Over the full 7 week period there were also 190 high visibility patrols in each of the target areas working alongside partners such as local authority and police and engaging with in excess of 5000 members of the public, as a result of these patrols 30 arrests for grass arson were made where in some cases ASB referrals were given.

Notable Events

In Bargoed (Caerphilly UA) The Rugby Stars Project was held in conjunction with Newport Gwent Dragons at Bargoed Park, 54 children attended over the 3 day period. Welsh International Andrew Coombes offered his support along with two other members of the Dragons squad, Johnathan Evans and Steffan Jones.

Gwent PCC Ian Johnston launched his Police and Crime Plan 2013-2017 on the final day of the event. Bernie raises awareness of issues that Mr Johnston aims to tackle as PCC including the dangers of deliberate grass and mountain fires, reducing anti social behaviour and protecting the environment.

The project was nominated in Rhondda Cynon Taff for the %love where you Live+awards and was selected as one of the finalists.

All areas where active patrols were taking place provided Police / PCSO/ Community Safety Wardens assistance which aided the operation.

The Bernie project was delivered through a multi agency approach led by the relevant Unitary Authority Community Safety Partnership as it has been in previous years.

For additional information about the Bernie project please contact Group Manager Garry Davies, Head of Fire Crime Unit, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, email g-davies@south-wales-fire.gov.uk. Feedback on this report is welcome and can be sent to the same address.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all partner agencies for participating in Bernie and assisting with the qualitative and quantitative research that has informed this report.

Background

The social marketing project was established in 2008 in an attempt to reduce deliberate grass fires in identified target areas and to change the behaviour of individuals.

In 2010 a successful pilot of Bernie was delivered in Tonypany (Rhondda Cynon Taff) with a 46% reduction in deliberate grass fires over the Easter period compared to the Control area of Aberdare. The success of this new innovative approach to behavioural change resulted in Welsh Government funding for the project up to 2012.

Target areas – how they were identified

In order to identify the target areas for the project analysis of historical fire data, available resources, finances and local knowledge identified the unitary authority areas in which the project would be delivered.

The selected areas of Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff also experience the highest number of deliberate grass fires which has been evidenced in previous years.

Due to financial constraints and resource limitations it is neither viable nor practical to deliver Bernie in the whole of each Unitary Authority area or Service wide therefore each Unitary Authority was broken down into fire station areas using deliberate grass fire statistical intelligence and local knowledge. Additionally anti-social behaviour data and partner agency data was considered when identifying the areas. This information combined with practical and financial considerations led to the target areas being identified which are as follows:

- Bridgend - Maesteg fire station area 50km
- Caerphilly - Bargoed fire station area 47km
- Merthyr Tydfil Merthyr Tydfil fire station area 115km
- Rhondda Cynon Taff Tonypany and Aberdare fire station areas 35km and 43km

Bernie 2013 was a multi agency partnership initiative working with the local communities to stop and reduce the number of deliberate grass fires.

A dedicated project manager was appointed to oversee the project across the Service area. Funding was significantly reduced for the 2013 project with no dedicated funding streams from Welsh Government however through the Community Safety Partnerships funds of £10k from Caerphilly and £1k from Bridgend were made available for the project.

Consideration was given to feedback received and analysis of previous years of the project and as a result the focus of the 2013 Bernie project was agreed to be:

- Reduction of deliberate grass fires
- Reduction of Anti Social Behaviour
- Community engagement and
- Public reassurance

Bernie 2013

The Bernie project for 2013 commenced on 11th March and concluded on the 26th April. The project was originally scheduled to run until its conclusion on the 3rd May but due to the inclement weather conditions the patrols for the final week were suspended.

There were different holiday periods within respective Unitary Authority areas which incorporated the school Easter holiday period.

The following were the key areas implemented using a partnership approach:

- High visibility patrols
- Zero tolerance of deliberate grass fire setting
- Advertising and marketing of Bernie in the 4 identified UA areas
- Use of social media to assist delivery of key messages
- Youth diversionary activities
- Community awareness raising
- Use of airwave radio for multi agency communication during patrols
- SWF&RS working with Police and Community Safety Wardens
- Link between Emergency control rooms

Partner agencies involved:

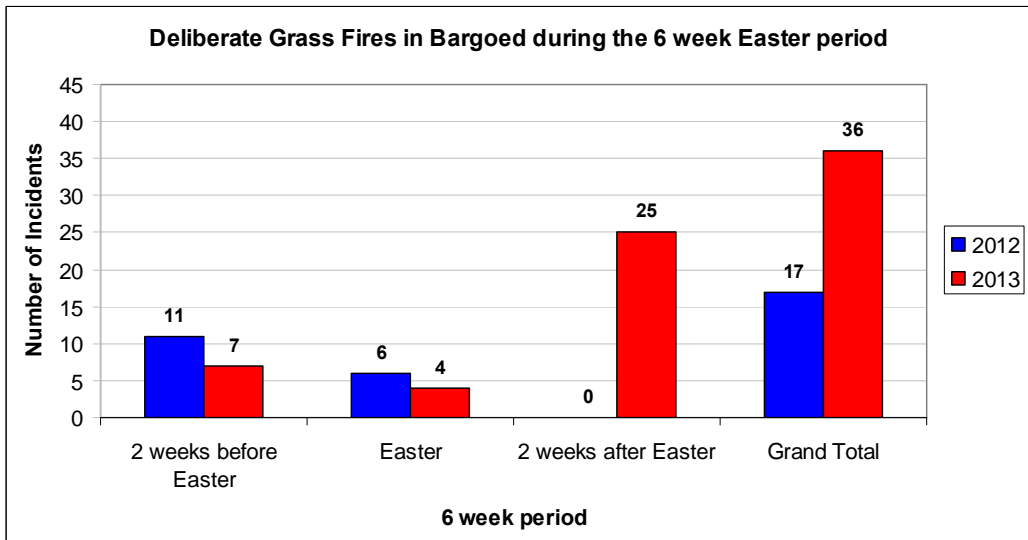
A wide variety of agencies were involved both directly and indirectly with the project this year. Whilst the following list is not exhaustive it provides an example of the partners involved:

- Bridgend County Borough Council
- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
- Merthyr Tydfil Community Safety Partnership
- Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council
- Rhondda Cynon Taff Community Safety Partnership
- Safer Bridgend Community Safety Partnership
- Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Partnership
- Unitary Authority Youth Services
- Countryside and parks
- Natural Resources Wales
- South Wales Police
- Gwent Police

Caerphilly UA – Bargoed Fire Station Area

The following is a summary of results for the Bargoed Station area compared with the same six week period last year:

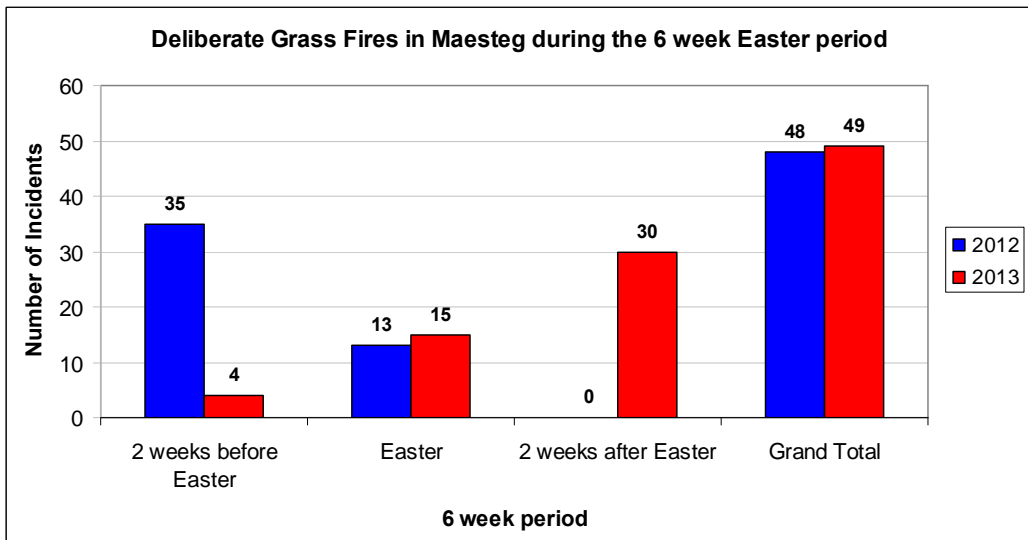
- For the two weeks that coincided with the School Easter holidays there was a 33% reduction.
- For the 2 weeks before Easter there was a 36% reduction.
- For the two weeks after Easter school holidays there was a 250% increase.
- Over the six week period Bargoed seen a 111% increase in activity.



Bridgend UA- Maesteg Fire Station Area

The following is a summary of results for the Maesteg Station area compared with the same six week period last year:

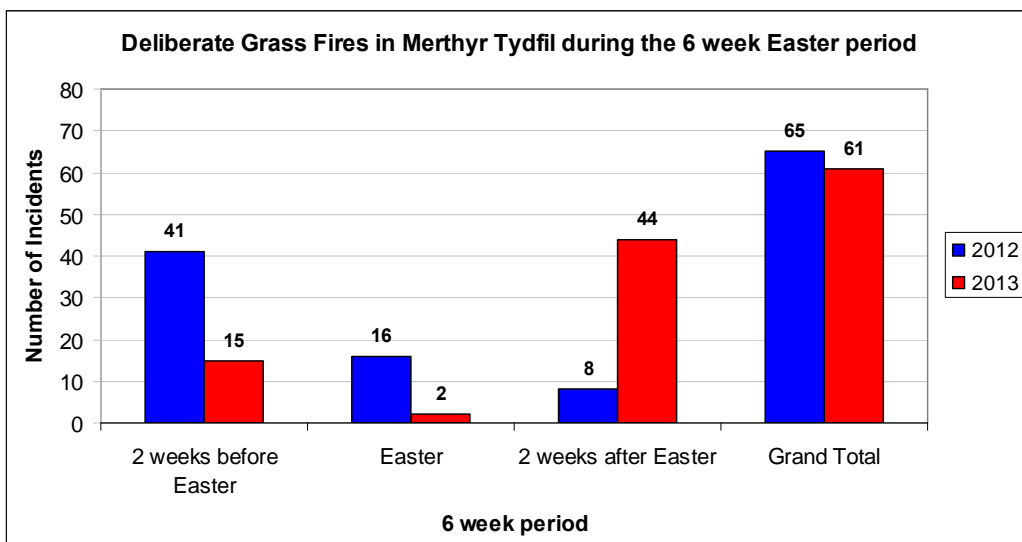
- For the two weeks that coincided with the School Easter holidays there was a 15% increase.
- For the 2 weeks before Easter there was a 88.5% reduction.
- For the two weeks after Easter school holidays there was a 300% increase.
- Over the six week period Maesteg seen a 2% increase in activity.



Merthyr Tydfil UA- Merthyr Fire Station

The following is a summary of results for the Merthyr Station area compared with the same six week period last year:

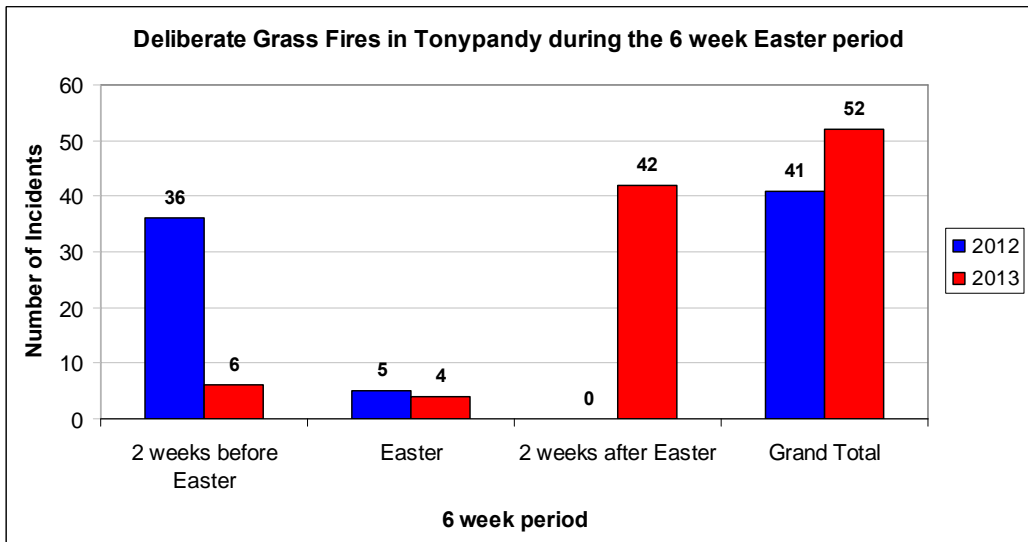
- For the two weeks that coincided with the School Easter holidays there was an 87% reduction.
- For the 2 weeks before Easter there was a 63% reduction.
- For the two weeks after Easter school holidays there was a 462% increase.
- Over the six week period Merthyr seen a 6% reduction in activity.



Rhondda Cynon Taf UA- Tonypandy Fire Station areas

The following is a summary of results for the Tonypandy Station area compared with the same six week period last year:

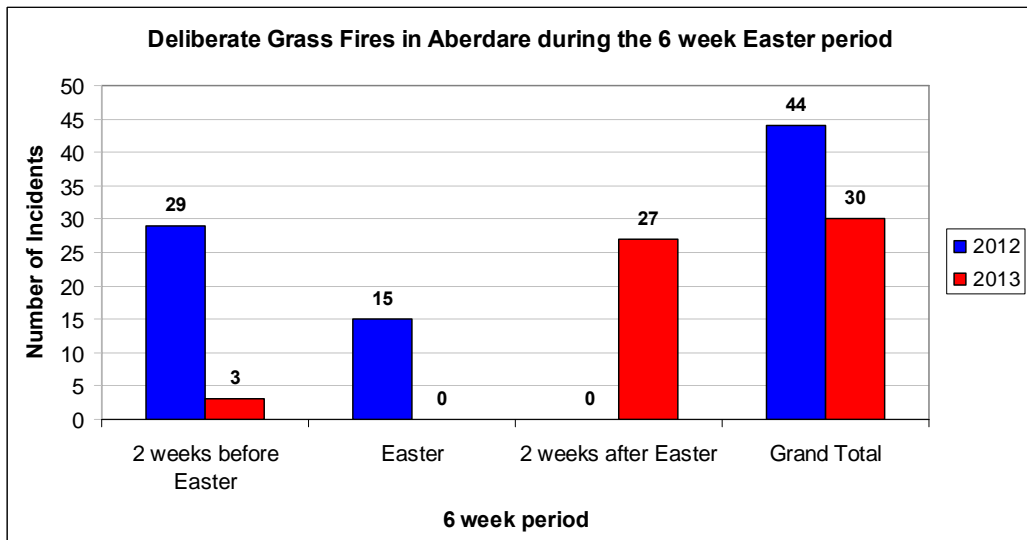
- For the two weeks that coincided with the School Easter holidays there was a 20% reduction.
- For the 2 weeks before Easter there was a 83% reduction.
- For the two weeks after Easter school holidays there was a 420% increase.
- Over the six week period Tonypandy seen a 28% increase in activity.



Rhondda Cynon Taf UA- Aberdare Fire Station areas

The following is a summary of results for the Aberdare Station area compared with the same six week period last year:

- For the two weeks that coincided with the School Easter holidays there was a 150% reduction.
- For the 2 weeks before Easter there was a 89% reduction.
- For the two weeks after Easter school holidays there was a 270% increase.
- Over the six week period Aberdare seen a 31% reduction in activity.



The intervention this year was scheduled to take place over a 7 week period commencing the 11th March. The priority weeks of the project were the school Easter holidays which due to the differing weeks across Unitary Authorities was spread over a 3 week period.

RCT . 25th March to 5th April
 Merthyr . 25th March to 5th April
 Caerphilly . 25th March to 5th April
 Bridgend - 1st April . 12th April

Historical statistical data suggests that the two week period prior to and following the Easter school holidays are also key times for seeing an increase in deliberate grass fires. Taking this into account the intervention commenced two weeks prior to the school holidays and was scheduled for two weeks following the holidays however due to inclement weather conditions this year the project was run for one week following the school holidays. During the weeks before and after school holidays high visibility patrols were in operation at known hot spot times and locations identified using various intelligence sources.

The purpose of this report is to measure the effectiveness of intervention elements . individually and collectively based on qualitative and quantitative data.

All participants were asked for feedback on the project by way of survey emailed to them individually, these were shared internally and externally and all partner agencies were encouraged to submit their observations and feedback.

The overarching aim of the Bernie project is to reduce the incidence of deliberate grass fires in the target areas.

Behavioural goals

Behavioural goal 1

“to promote socially positive alternative behaviours and limit or remove opportunities for negative behaviour that could lead to deliberate causing of grass fires with a particular focus on young people between 13 and 16 years of age”

In previous projects young people from local schools were encouraged to attend the activities but this year it was agreed following feedback that the organisations involved should equally target those young people who had already offended or were on the cusp of offending and therefore agencies and partners such as Probation service, Youth offending teams, Anti Social behaviour teams in each of the Community Safety Partnerships, Pupil Referral Units and the local Police were encouraged to refer individuals who they felt would benefit from attending the activities.

Behavioural goal 2

“to encourage and support key professionals and organisations in working together adopting a holistic and co-ordinated approach.”

Delivering a multi agency approach is often difficult with all agencies having potentially differing objectives.

Feedback has been sought from all partners involved in the implementation of the 2013 project and this feedback has been utilised to identify strengths and weaknesses of the project. It was proposed that this information would be analysed to identify common themes and confirm the positive experience of partnership working. The limitation on this process was the lack of surveys returned which was disappointing. The information received from partners such as police, Community Safety partnerships, internal staff etc has been summarised and the results are as follows:

Strengths:

- Divisionary activities
- Joint patrols with Police, Community Safety Wardens and Fire and Rescue Service
- High visibility patrols demonstrating zero tolerance approach whilst interacting with local residents and community
- Working alongside Community Safety Wardens in the Bargoed area

Weaknesses:

- Differing levels of involvement by some partners

Statistical evaluation

The statistical data contained in the report has been supplied by the Performance Management Unit of South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and details the incidents experienced organisation wide and also specifically to the areas in which Bernie was delivered in 2013.

It is imperative to take into account the impact that differing weather conditions can have and also the change in the date of Easter.

Overall Summary of deliberate grass fire statistics

Evaluation of the deliberate grass fire data was challenging due to the various factors identified. Each target area has received differing levels of commitment from key partners and stakeholders which arguably influenced the delivery of interventions and affected the impact of behavioural change.

As mentioned previously in this report the weather plays a significant role in the number of incidents received. Easter 2013 and the run up to the period saw long periods of dry weather with significant rainfall towards the end of the school holidays. During the dry weather South Wales Fire and Rescue service experienced a significant increase in deliberate grass fire incidents.

The benefit and impact of the project will only be apparent over a period of time and continued delivery of Bernie will identify the significant impact the project has on the instances of deliberate grass fires for the organisation.

Summary of diversionary activities:

In addition to the Fire Service Youth Engagement activities the local Authorities also arranged their own diversionary activities. Local Authorities organised sessions in community rooms such as crafts, play station tournaments, Easter Egg hunts. Young people also took part in Rugby camps arranged by The Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Partnership, at these they were even able to meet International Rugby players. Cllr David Poole, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services said, "This excellent project uses a combination of techniques to tackle the issue of deliberate grass fires . an issue which traditionally sees an increase during the Easter holiday period. Using the rugby camps and a high profile player as a diversion for the youngsters is a stroke of genius. Alongside the diversionary activities, high visibility patrols and awareness raising events throughout the community have taken place. I hope we are able to continue our run of amazing results that have been seen in past years that the project has been delivered."

Social marketing tools such as Facebook and Twitter were also utilised to engage with a further young people within the communities. Followers of Twitter and Facebook were able to view photographs of themselves taking part in activities such as Fire Fighter For a Day and the X-Box Challenge.

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service organised and delivered 20 days of diversionary activity and events across the target areas resulting in **164** young people being engaged in activity.

Communications

The use of the Airwave system enabled excellent communications between Emergency controls, police, community wardens and the fire service to ensure resources were located in the correct locations.

Crime Reduction

In previous years there has been a reduction in anti social behaviour throughout the duration of the project in certain areas. At the time of writing figures are not available for the 2013 project to compare against previous years.

Debrief

Following feedback during the 2012 debrief it was decided to carry out an electronic style debrief which enabled partners to consult with us to make their recommendations for 2014.

These were collated by the Business Support department within South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and the recommendation of these have been placed in the planning for 2014. 40 completed surveys were returned to the organisation.

These recommendations centred mostly on the enforcement area of the project and to ensure that in future there is more opportunity for arrest and charge.

The element that most who were involved stated that the use of operational personnel aided both the diversionary activities and the patrols by bringing in local knowledge.

Comments taken directly from the surveys:

The survey asked for comments on the activities and engagement events offered and the following was suggested:

- Improve current events and trips (rock climbing, river walking, hikes, quad biking and abseiling)
- More school talks,
- Appliances to attend schools and give grass fire talks similar to the KS1 and KS2 talks already carried out
- Work closer with Yips and Yops to help with known and potential offenders
- Greater landowner engagement

The survey also asked for recommendations and suggestions on how the project could be improved. Some of the suggestions were:

- Make FF for a day more varied and interesting
- More events
- Patrol in unmarked vehicles
- Improve liaison with police
- Referral process for activities needs improving
- The same activities/promotional items for each UA as differences across each of the areas

Additional comments made are:

“the diversionary sessions are not targeting the right groups of young people....they are not the hard to reach groups that are lighting the fires....

There needs to be more involvement with the schools, YOS, and police as well as Crimes and Consequences and Phoenix to target the right groups."

"needs more involvement from other agencies"

"need to work closely with land owners and farmers"

"provide more patrols over a larger area and more patrols in key areas over a longer period of time"

"need to make the activities more varied and interesting"

"can improve the project and further reduce deliberate grass fires by achieving a more effective multi agency approach to the matter"

"target the summer months and other periods of dry weather"

"take a more low profile approach to the patrols hopefully catching young people committing the acts"

"need to convince police and judiciary to treat grass fires as anti-social behaviour"

"do nothing for a year to see what impact this would have on the communities. Is there a link between the advertising of Bernie and the rise in fire-related ASB during the project?"

"need to have a controlled burning policy each year to reduce the fire/fuel loading"

"graphic posters of consequences of setting grass fires similar to Blood on your hands campaign"

"should work directly with Pupil Referral units rather than go to schools"

"involve Countryside Council of Wales in patrols"

"introduce off road bike/quad bike patrols to deter locals from lighting fires and give police chance of catching perpetrators"

Recommendations

Recommendations for the future of Bernie are as follows:

- Greater buy in and support from partner agencies is essential to drive the project forward for future years.
- In a box for 2014 there will be a larger focus on diversionary activities across our recommended risk areas, this will be achieved by using station resources to carry out these activities.
- Further engagement with landowners.
- Patrols and diversionary activities all year round to correspond with spike in grass fires activity.
- Continue utilising and involving Fire Service operational staff for patrols and diversionary activities.
- Utilise further the communication links to assist in multi agency communication.

Appendix 1

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service 2013 Results

RCT busiest Unitary

Monmouthshire quietest followed by the Vale (7)

Merthyr busiest station closely followed by Maesteg (56) and Tonypany (52)

No grass fires reported at Cardiff Central, Chepstow, Monmouth, Cowbridge and Llantwit Major

Most fires were attended on Tuesday 2nd April

No fires occurred on 16th, 21st, 23rd March and 11th to 14th April

Most fires occurred on a Tuesday averaging over 23 per day

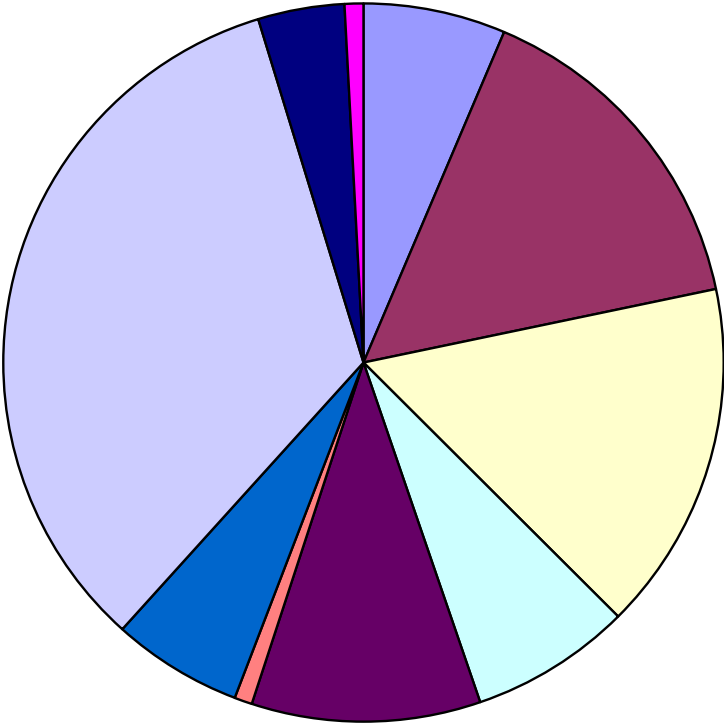
81 fires occurred on 2 of the 5 Saturdays in the period but no fires occurred on the remaining 3 Saturdays

0 - 20:00 7 to 8 in the evening is the busiest hour for grass fires to start

Whitchurch area received the most grass fires in a single hour when 4 were reported between 13:00 and 14:00 on Sunday 7th April

Porth station had the highest level of fires per 10,000 population at 37.87 Maesteg, Abercynon, Bargoed, Hirwaun and Treorchy also have an index of more than 20

Grass Fires by Unitary Authority



- Blaenau Gwent
- Bridgend
- Caerphilly
- Cardiff
- Merthyr
- Monmouthshire
- Newport
- RCT
- Torfaen
- Vale of Glamorgan