

# Knysna inferno bill estimated at R4bn

## Burning of pine cones may have caused fires

Marvin Charles

THE CATASTROPHIC fire that engulfed the holiday town of Knysna, cost R4 billion and was probably started by someone burning pine cones.

Yesterday the municipality's Fire and Rescue Services released the fire report detailing the extent of the damage. The report found that the fire was started by burning pine cones in a clearing on private land in the Elandskraal area. It is unclear whether the fire was started deliberately only that "human activity" was to blame.

The Chief of Fire and Rescue in Knysna, Clinton Manuel, said the investigation started on June 8, a day after three fires broke out in Knysna. "Using the scientific method while investigating the fire I came up with two hypotheses. The first one is based on the fostering part that the fire started in the Non V area (Which refers to the shape in which the fire was burnt) and that the fire was caused by lightning on April 12. This forms the basis of hypothesis one.

"Hypothesis two is that the fire originated in the V pattern area in the Elandskraal area (the fire spread in a distinctive pattern) and is probably man made and not an act of God," Manuel said.

He also said the wind played a huge role in the spreading of the fire. "What we know about wildfires is that it first ignites light fuel and then spreads to heavy fuels. What we also know is that the fires also form a distinctive V pattern, we also know heavy fuels were found in the clearing."

Manuel used science to assist him to compile the report.

"What we have concluded is that the cause of the fire is most likely to be human activity, however, we have looked at other reports to see if we model that against the wind patterns. The evidence does not cor-

roborate that. What we can see is that the evidence corroborates the start of the fire and it's consistent with the weather pattern and human activity," municipal manager Kam Chetty said.

Chetty said that the matter would be raised with police and forensic evidence gathered will be presented to the police for further investigation.

Chetty also provided a breakdown of the

To comment on this story email [arglet@inl.co.za](mailto:arglet@inl.co.za) or send a SMS to **32 027** (SMS costs R1) Provide your physical address and phone number (not for publication).

estimated cost relating to the fire: damage to health infrastructure was R1.3 million, agriculture R40m; human settlement R61m; water R91m; environmental dam-

age R134m; transport and public work R8m and social development R25m.

In June fires wreaked havoc, killing nine people and destroying 1 070 homes.

Knysna received donations from businesses and organisations. A benefit concert was held on August 7 and proceeds went to those who were affected by the Cape storm and the Knysna fire. - [marvin.charles@inl.co.za](mailto:marvin.charles@inl.co.za)



**SHARP:** Waseelah Edwards, Mugammad Noordien, Lindiwe Trout-Naidoo and Faatimah Schloss of South Peninsula High School. With less than a week to go to the semi-finals and finals of the Cape Argus Food Lover's Market High Schools Quiz, a Cape Argus team went to watch one of the last knock-out rounds at Sea Point High School yesterday. See Page 8

PICTURE: DAVID RITCHIE