Safety flags now required for 4WDs crossing the Simpson Desert

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<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/Home/Media_Centre/News_Events_Listing/140313-safety-flags>

Visitor safety in South Australia's outback parks will be further improved from Sunday, 16 March 2014 with a new mandatory condition for vehicles travelling in the Simpson Desert Regional Reserve and Simpson Desert Conservation Park.

4WDs will now be required to attach tall, high visibility flags while motorbikes will be required to drive with their lights on at all times while travelling.

The new requirement comes into effect with the annual re-opening of these parks after the annual summer closure and will be a requirement of Desert Parks Passes purchased from this time. Natural Resources SA Arid Lands Outback District Manager, Mr Tony Magor said safety flags have always been recommended in the Simpson Desert as visibility can be impaired when travelling over the countless sand dunes.

"Safety flags give drivers a greater chance of seeing approaching vehicles and minimise the risk of accidents when cresting dunes in one of the most remote parts of the state," he said.

The increase in people undertaking a crossing of the Simpson Desert from either west to east or east to west on the tracks has also contributed to the recommendation being elevated to mandatory status.

"More than 12,000 people crossed the Simpson Desert in 2013," said Mr Magor.

"The sheer volume of vehicles and motorbikes has increased the risks, while near misses are also on the rise."

Consultation with key stakeholders including Friends of Parks groups, 4WD South Australia, local businesses, industry and interstate national parks services contributed to the formation of the safety flag requirements.

4WD South Australia President, Mr Lee Smith has welcomed the mandatory condition for Desert Park Passes.

"Many 4WD enthusiasts have the Simpson Desert crossing on their 'bucket list' and we want it to be memorable for all the right reasons," Mr Smith said.

"Most of us take our safety in the outback very seriously, but some, through naivety or over-confidence take unnecessary risks – making vehicle safety flags mandatory takes away the element of choice," Mr Smith said.

Flags that meet the new requirements can be purchased at both Mt Dare and Birdsville and a widespread communication campaign will spread the word to visitors.

Safety flag requirement

All vehicles must be fitted with a safety flag as detailed below when travelling in the Simpson Desert Conservation Park or Simpson Desert Regional Reserve.

Flag:

- Minimum 300mm wide by 290mm high
- Made of fluorescent materials, red-orange or lime-yellow in colour

Vehicles:

- With front bullbar - flag pole attached to the bullbar, with top of the flag a minimum 3.5 metres from the ground
- Without front bullbar - flag pole attached via bracket at the front of the vehicle, with top of the flag a minimum 3.5 metres from the ground; alternatively flag pole attached to the front of the roof rack, with top of the flag a minimum 2 metres from the roof of vehicle