



Focus on Orchard Burning: Tear-Out & Prunings

from Ecology's Air Quality Program

Background

Many orchards are being torn out due to fluctuating markets. Although it appears that the easiest way to dispose of the torn out material is to burn it, there are simple alternatives to burning that don't harm air quality. These include chipping, shredding, mulching, and composting. The results of using these alternatives – happy neighbors, healthy workers, and clean air for our families and communities – are worth the effort.

What's wrong with burning?

We've known for a long time that smoke is bad for human health, whether it's from a cigarette or from an outdoor fire. When you burn orchard materials, the resulting smoke can affect your neighbors in the entire surrounding area. It's illegal to unreasonably impact others with smoke from your fire. Many growers have already heard from upset neighbors and downwind residents. As residential burning is being phased out for most citizens, growers are also looking for alternatives.

Aren't alternatives to burning complicated and difficult?

Growers can use any of the alternatives to burning fairly easily with a little planning and effort. Many growers have already started to use them. Limbs from pulled-up trees can be cut, dried, and sold as firewood to be burned in a clean, approved wood burning stove. They can be chipped in large chippers and grinders. Root balls can be shaken to remove dirt, then be reintroduced to the orchard. Some growers are considering contracting for chipping/shredding services or buying chippers/shredders themselves. They can combine resources with other growers to purchase them. Most growers already mow tailings with a mulching mower. Ditchbanks and fencelines can also be mowed regularly to keep weeds down.

If I do burn, do I need a permit?

Orchard tear-out burns consisting of large branches and/or stumps require a permit. Debris resulting from the cutting of orchard trees down to the stump and grafting new trees also requires a permit. An Orchard Tear-Out Agricultural Burn Permit application can be acquired from either Ecology or your local permitting authority.

Acreage is determined by the number of acres the orchard trees were planted on, not the size of the tear out pile. The permit fee is \$2 per acre, with a minimum fee of \$25. An approved permit is required on site prior to burning.

Materials exempt from permit requirements are:

- + Natural vegetation along ditchbanks and fencelines, or irrigation and drainage ditches;
- + Windblown tumbleweeds; and
- + Annual orchard prunings.

What else do I need to know?

You must know local air pollution and fire control rules before you burn. Material to be burned must be dry, free of dirt and non-agricultural or non-woody material, and loosely stacked so that air can circulate freely. Ecology will declare a permissive “burn day” when weather conditions are expected to produce enough ventilation to disperse the added burden of smoke. Prior to burning, growers must call the agricultural burn line, 800-406-5322, to find out whether it is a burn or no-burn day based on smoke ventilation forecasts. Growers must follow Best Management Practices for non-cereal grain crops. The Best Management Practices address when burning is needed and when it is not. Growers must refer to these Best Management Practices and prove to the permitting authority that burning is the only way to solve the problem at hand.

Good burning practices:

- + Allow the materials to dry for as long as possible prior to burning.
- + Make several small diameter, tall piles rather than one large, sprawling pile.
- + Build and maintain burn piles to allow good air circulation and promote efficient burning.
- + Mix small-sized material with large material.
- + Remove as much dirt as possible from the burn pile.
- + Use clean, dry, small diameter wood as kindling.
- + Light a small test fire before starting your fire to check the direction of the smoke plume and ventilation and make sure the plume is blowing away from neighbors.
- + Do not use diesel or other liquid fuel to ignite or accelerate the fire.
- + Ignite the fire on the upwind side.
- + Build and maintain as hot a fire as possible, and don't allow smoldering.
- + Avoid burning during winter months or at any time during an air inversion (call the burn hotline to find out if there is an inversion).

Information

For more information on orchard burning practices, contact your regional Department of Ecology office.

For Adams, Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Franklin, Garfield, Grant, Lincoln, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Walla Walla and Whitman counties call: (509)-329-3400

For Chelan, Okanogan, Douglas, Kittitas and Klickitat counties call: (509) 575-2490

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