

Fees help pay to support state's farmers, protect air and health

Ecology regulates agricultural burning to protect public health while keeping burning available as an important tool for farmers. Ecology's Air Quality Program does this through its smoke management system. This system operates seven days a week, including holidays, to help farmers – a substantial investment in effort and support. This focus sheet explains recent changes to fees charged to farmers for agricultural burning permits.

The issue

Farmers sometimes burn crop residue after harvest. Some examples of residue are cereal grain stubble and cut-down orchard trees. Smoke from this burning can harm the health of people who breathe in the smoke's harmful particles and toxics. If this smoke is carefully managed, impacts to the public are limited and burning remains a valuable tool for farmers. If the smoke is not managed well, people can be exposed to harmful levels of smoke.

Permits and fees for burning

Growers must have permits to burn most types of agricultural residue. The 2010 Washington Legislature amended the law (RCW 70.94.6528) that authorizes a permit fee for agricultural burning. The change raises the permit fee cap from \$2.25 per acre to a maximum of \$3.75 per acre. This is the first increase to the fee cap since 1991.

The Legislature also approved a new way to assess fees. Fees can now be assessed for pile burning instead of on a per-acre basis. This new fee is capped at \$1 per ton of material burned. The Agricultural Burning Practices and Research Task Force (Task Force) will set the amount of the fees under the new caps. The current fee for agricultural burning is \$2.25 per acre.

MORE INFORMATION

Summary of major changes:

- The cap on agricultural burning fees increases from \$2.50 to a maximum of \$3.75 per acre. This allows the Agricultural Burning Practices and Research Task Force to set fees at or below the cap and adjust them up to the cap in future years. This provides on-going support for Ecology's smoke management system, now and in the future.
- Instead of charging all agricultural burning fees on a "per-acre" basis, the change adds a "per-ton" fee for materials collected and burned in piles. The law caps the "per-ton" fee for pile burning at \$1.
- The Task Force still has fee-setting authority. Ecology will establish fees in rule after the Task Force sets the amounts.

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How the new fees will work

In May and June 2010, the Task Force will meet to discuss both the amount of the new fee for the per-acre fee cap, and the amount of the fee per ton of material burned. After the Task Force sets the fees, Ecology will establish them in rule (WAC 173-430). Ecology expects the new fees will take effect for the January 2011 burning season.

How this will benefit Washington

Increasing fees will help ensure Ecology can continue to provide needed, quality smoke management support for farmers and citizens 365 days per year. This will help limit the effects of smoke on public health.

More information

See the Air Quality Program's agricultural burning page:

http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/air/aginfo/agricultural_homepage.htm