



# Focus on **Agricultural Burning**

From Ecology's Air Quality Program

## **General Agricultural Burning Information**

Management of agricultural burning is changing in the Northwest, and Washington State is leading the way. This change is part of a comprehensive revision of the state's air pollution law that affects not just agriculture, but many other commercial, individual and governmental activities. The Clean Air Washington Act of 1991 states that those who contribute to air pollution will share the job of protecting air quality.

Approximately 2,000 agricultural fires are set each year in Washington State to control weeds and plant diseases, and to dispose of debris. Some 250,000 acres of fields, along with the collected trimmings and cuttings of many more acres, are burned annually.

An estimated 40,000 tons of pollution comes from this type of agricultural burning. This includes particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds. These pollutants can aggravate heart and lung disease; irritate eyes, throat, and sinuses; trigger headaches and allergies; and increase the severity of pre-existing health problems such as asthma, emphysema, pneumonia and bronchitis.

## **What is agricultural burning, and do I need a permit?**

Agricultural burning is defined as "the burning of vegetative debris from agricultural operations necessary for disease or pest control, crop propagation, or crop rotation, or where identified as a best management practice." The Clean Air Act allows for agricultural burning, excluding field and turf grass grown for seed, when each of the following conditions is met:

- + It is reasonably necessary to carry out the enterprise.
- + Proper weather and air quality conditions exist.
- + A permit designed to minimize air pollution to the extent practical has been obtained from the air quality agency or a delegated permitting authority.

Agricultural burn permits are required to burn any open fields, harvest debris, or orchard trees being taken out of production. Permits are not required to burn annual orchard prunings, natural vegetation along fencelines or irrigation and drainage ditches, and windblown tumbleweeds.

Prior to any burning, the grower must call the toll-free agricultural burn line, 800-406-5322, to find out whether it is a burn or no-burn day, based on smoke ventilation forecasts.

## Delegated permitting authorities

The Department of Ecology has delegated the authority to issue agricultural burn permits to the following agencies in the counties listed below:

Adams	Conservation District	(509) 659-1553
Asotin	Conservation District	(509) 758-8012
Columbia	Conservation District	(509) 382-4773
Franklin	Conservation District	(509) 545-8546
Garfield	Pomeroy Conservation District	(509) 843-1998
Grant	Grant Conservation District	(509) 754-0195
Walla Walla	Conservation District	(509) 522-6340
Whitman	1) Palouse-Rock Lake Consv. District	(509) 648-3680
	2) Palouse Conservation District	(509) 332-4101
	3) Whitman Conservation District	(509) 397-4953
	4) Pine Creek	(509) 397-4636

In eastern Washington counties not listed, call the Department of Ecology at (509) 329-3400.

In central Washington counties not listed, call the Department of Ecology at (509) 575-2490.

In Benton, Spokane and Yakima counties, a local air authority handles permits.

## Agricultural Burning Practices and Research Task Force

The Clean Air Act established the Agricultural Burning Practices and Research Task Force. Task force members represent the farming community, conservation districts, the state departments of Agriculture and Ecology, local air authorities, college or university agricultural specialists, and the public health or medical community.

Best management practices (BMPs) related to agricultural burning and air quality were adopted by the task force in 1996 and must be cited as a required aspect of the agricultural burn permit. The task force, with the assistance of agricultural experts and the agricultural community, revised the BMPs in the spring of 1999 with the goal of reducing emissions from agricultural burning.

The task force also sets the burn permit fee, identifies research needs, and recommends research funding priorities to explore and test economical and practical alternative practices to agricultural burning.

## For more information

Department of Ecology, Air Quality Program -- Olympia	(360) 407-6830
Department of Ecology, Air Quality Program -- Spokane	(509) 329-3400
Department of Ecology, Air Quality Program -- Yakima	(509) 575-2490

*If you need this publication in another format, please call Tami Dahlgren at (360) 407-6830. If you are a person with a speech or hearing impairment, call 711 or 1-800-833-6388 for TTY.*