

**Farming for Cleaner Air:
Pulling Together to Make Progress**



The 1999 field-burning season marks the start of a seven-year commitment by wheat growers to cut smoke emissions from field burning by 50 percent. Threats to public health are expected to be greatly reduced as a result of this action. But what does this agreement mean for growers? This brochure explains the reasons for reducing field burning and tells where to get information on complying with the reductions.

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Why not continue field burning as usual?

Growers have used burning to manage their crops for many years. In recent years, however, people living in or near agricultural areas have become increasingly concerned about the health effects of smoke from field burning. These smoke emissions contain air pollutants including 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. Young children, the elderly, and people suffering from respiratory diseases are most likely to experience health problems.

Despite the efforts of many growers to direct smoke away from population centers and to burn only under specific weather conditions, smoke from field burning has continued to be a problem. In February 1999, the Department of Ecology, the Department of Agriculture, and the Washington Association of Wheat Growers signed a voluntary agreement calling for reductions in smoke from wheat stubble burning that average at least seven percent each year for seven years. This agreement is in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding, or MOU.

What are your responsibilities as a grower?

As in the past, you will need to get a permit before doing any field burning. However, there is now a new set of best management practices (BMPs) for field burning. The BMPs help you identify circumstances under which burning is permitted. Key changes in the BMPs require the grower to:

- Consider alternatives to burning first.
- Manage low residue without burning.
- Submit plans to reduce the need to burn the same acreage year after year.
- Provide prior notice of their intent to burn.
- Burn only on days designated for as "burn days" and only during certain hours.

These changes to the permitting program should reduce emissions from agricultural burning.



A technique for turning wheat stubble into high-grade strawboard products will one day be as commonplace as particleboard. Using a combination of wheat straw and plastic resins, strawboard can be used in furniture, flooring, and any other product requiring particleboard. This technique was developed at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

What's next?

Under the agreement, growers themselves will help figure out how to reduce smoke emissions by 50 percent. The Washington Association of Wheat Growers, along with agricultural and state agencies, will continue to provide education on alternatives to burning and other ways to minimize field burning.

With the goal of reducing smoke emissions, the Agricultural Burning Practices and Research Task Force continues to provide funding for research in the following areas:

- On-farm practices to reduce the need to burn.
- Ways to use straw.
- Learning more about field burning emissions.

The *Memorandum of Understanding* and the new *Best Management Practices* (BMPs) show a good faith effort on the part of the involved agencies, cereal grain growers, and agricultural interests to work together toward reducing emissions from agricultural burning. To continue using burning as an agricultural tool, the agricultural community must work together to prove that they are committed to supporting the positive framework set in place through the BMPs and the voluntary agreement. With a commitment from individual growers to work toward reducing burning on their farms, and with continuing research on alternatives to burning, both growers and their communities can benefit.

For more information

For more details on complying with the reductions and managing your fields to burn as little as possible, contact:

Washington Association of Wheat Growers

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