

## Focus on Yard Waste Report to the Legislature

### Why did Ecology produce this report?

During the 2007 legislative session, lawmakers directed the department to assess opportunities to use yard waste and land-clearing debris, instead of burning it, and recommend best management practices that would work in smaller communities.

The findings and recommendations are contained in the report titled "Best Management Practices of Vegetative Solid Wastes for Urban Growth Areas of Less than 5,000 Population."

### Why is this a problem?

Smoke from burning wood and yard waste poses a serious human health risk, especially for young children and older adults. Smoke is linked to health problems such as lung cancer and asthma, and leads to increased health costs. The Clean Air Act, adopted in 1991, began phasing out outdoor burning of yard wastes and land clearing debris in urban growth areas. The law set a date of December 31, 2000, for compliance. However, cities with populations of less than 5,000 were granted an extension until December 31, 2006.

### How did Ecology gather information for the report?

Ecology gathered information through a series of "listening sessions" with representatives from communities that need to find alternatives to outdoor burning.

The department followed the listening sessions by convening a stakeholder work group. Members commented on a draft of the department's findings, and provided many valuable insights and perspectives. There was general agreement and support for the potential solutions identified in the report. While we confined our work to "...assess opportunities, other than burning..." per the proviso, some members wanted to include recommendations related to outdoor burning practices.

All of the funds (\$2 million) made available in the budget proviso were directed to local governments in the form of grants. None of these funds were used, as allowed, to produce the report.

### What were some of the report's major findings?

The primary finding of the listening sessions was that many small communities and rural counties do not have the financial resources to

#### MORE INFORMATION

For more information: Outdoor Burning Website:  
[http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/air/outdoor\\_woodsmoke/2007Burn\\_Ban\\_FAQ.htm](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/air/outdoor_woodsmoke/2007Burn_Ban_FAQ.htm)

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purchase, operate, insure, and maintain yard waste management programs. Funding new programs in communities with low or limited revenue sources is challenging.

As the population in the state continues to grow in all areas, demands on public infrastructure become stressed. The solid waste management infrastructure competes poorly with other priorities of government. Basic solid waste management infrastructure, such as waste transfer stations, is lacking in some rural counties. Citizens do not have convenient, affordable options by which to dispose of their wastes.

Several communities in the state already provide services, other than burning, for management of yard wastes. These services include collection for composting or chipping. As a result of the grant offering made available in the proviso, many more communities will be offering such services.

Some communities believe that the ban on outdoor burning in small urban growth areas is an imposition on small cities and towns. They believe that until a low-cost solution is found, they should be able to continue to practice outdoor burning under a permit program.

### **What were some of the best management practices recommended?**

The best management practice is to use yard and land-debris waste, either as mulch or compost. Use is beneficial for soil health and stabilization, water conservation, and plant production. The least preferred alternative is disposal, either by burying or incineration in permitted disposal facilities. Outdoor burning is not an option.

One size does not fit all. Best management practices will vary from city to city. Community location, quantity of materials and sources and types of waste all play a part in determining the best alternatives for use of yard waste. Communities should be encouraged to develop uses that best fit local needs. This can only be done on a case-by-case basis.

In those areas where alternatives to disposal are NOT readily available and effective, landfill or incineration for energy recovery at permitted solid waste disposal facilities must remain an option. Otherwise, illegal dumping and outdoor burning will continue.

### **What were some of the potential funding solutions recommended?**

The report suggests that adequate financial resources must be available so communities can establish collection and use programs. Dedicated funding should continue to be available to develop the necessary infrastructure and promote new technologies. Funding programs must allow for development of unique local alternatives that will work.

Communities that have not received funding for yard waste projects in the past should be given priority in future funding cycles. The report also recommends providing flexible match requirements for economically disadvantaged communities.

Existing infrastructure should be used, where possible. In the solid waste management law, the Legislature encouraged local governments to use the expertise of private industry and to contract with private industry to the fullest extent possible to carry out solid waste recovery and/or recycling programs. Local governments should take advantage of these opportunities.