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Smoke Management Plan Webinar

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Smoke Management Plan?

The Smoke Management Plan (SMP) establishes a program managed by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to allow silvicultural burning on forestland, while protecting public health. The original plan was drafted in the 1970s, revised in 1998 and then adopted into the state's air quality plan, known as the State Implementation Plan (SIP), which is enforceable under federal law.

What does it do?

The SMP provides regulatory direction, operating procedures, and advisory information regarding the management of smoke and fuels from silvicultural burning on the forestlands of Washington state.

Does it apply to me?

It applies to all persons, landowners, companies, state and federal land management agencies, tribes who opt in to the plan, and others who conduct silvicultural burning in Washington state.

This SMP does not apply to agricultural burning or other outdoor burning. It also does not apply to burning done "by rule" under WAC 332-24 or on non-forested wildlands (e.g., range lands).

What is "silvicultural" burning?

In forest management, called silviculture, one way to remove the forest debris left over from the forestry work is to conduct a prescribed fire. A prescribed fire is a controlled application of fire to wildland fuels, like grasses and near-ground shrubbery, in either their natural or modified state under specific environmental conditions. This protocol allows the fire to be confined to a predetermined area and, at the same time, to produce the fire line intensity and rate of spread required to attain planned forestland management objectives.

Is there a difference between prescribed fire and silvicultural burning?

The short answer is "no." There are many types of forest debris burning done with many objectives in mind.

- Pile burning: Burning material in piles as opposed to other configurations. Piles can be mechanically built or built by hand. Piles are built and burned for many reasons, a couple examples are; as a result of a tree harvest or for thinning for forest health reasons.

- Under burning: Prescribed burning with low fire intensities under a timber canopy. Under burning can also be referred to as “natural burning,” under burning can be used to reduce light fuels and protect stands from wildfire.
- Broadcast burning: Prescribed burning of debris on a designated unit of land, where the debris has not been piled or windrowed, by allowing fire to spread freely over the entire area. Broadcast burning was more prevalent before mechanical piles became more common practice.

Why is DNR holding a webinar? Why is the state Department of Ecology involved?

The SMP has been revised and DNR would like to provide an update and share new information using a public webinar on the plan.

Legislation passed in 2019 allows limited burning in Urban Growth Areas, which was not previously allowed. DNR will discuss the law and describe how DNR will continue to protect public health while allowing this burning.

The state Department of Ecology (Ecology) is involved because they are the agency in charge of the state’s air quality plan, called the State Implementation Plan (SIP). The SMP is an important part of the SIP. Ecology will talk about the state air quality plan and the steps needed to adopt the plan.

Where do I find more information on prescribed burns near me?

DNR maintains an online burn portal. It contains permit information, data, and maps about burn locations. It allows burners to apply, sign, and pay for applications. DNR then issues the permits electronically. The web portal is located here: <https://burnportal.dnr.wa.gov/>

How can I get help with the burn portal?

DNR’s Smoke Management Coordinator is happy to provide a short demonstration of the highlights of the burn portal. For assistance, please email DNRburnportal@dnr.wa.gov.

Where can I send my comments?

DNR has set up an email account for comments on the SMP or prescribed burning. In addition, Ecology will hold a formal public comment period as part of the SIP submission process.

What is the SIP submission process?

After DNR finishes updating the SMP, DNR will analyze the changes in the plan to ensure air quality remains protected. When this is done, DNR submits this information to Ecology. Ecology will hold a formal public comment period in late spring and, after responding to comments, will submit it to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for approval.