

Farm Practices in B.C. Reference Guide

Strengthening Farming Program



Ministry of
Agriculture
and Food

FACTSHEET

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FARM ACTIVITY: BURNING

Description

Stack Burning

Stack burning is conducted with control of combustion air and a stack or chimney to vent the emitted products of combustion into the atmosphere. Agricultural examples include the burning of fuel in greenhouses and the disposal of mortalities in incinerators.

Open Burning

Open burning is the combustion of material with or without combustion air control, and without a stack or chimney to vent the emitted products of combustion into the atmosphere. Farmers may use open burning as a tool to manage crop residues and in the control of weeds, vegetative residue and brush on pasture and range. Burning is also conducted to dispose of orchard and vineyard prunings, tree stumps, straw, diseased crop material, and brush piles from land which has been cleared.

Environmental Concerns

Smoke from the open burning of vegetation and wood introduces a range of contaminants into the air, among them particulate matter, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and hydrocarbon compounds. Open burning of plant prunings and similar materials can also release ash, soot, char, dust, and other particulate matter. Coarse or settleable ash particles may deposit on nearby properties, creating aesthetic concerns and nuisance complaints. Further details on open burning are outlined below in the section on legislation.

Nuisance Concerns

The three primary disturbances referred to in the provincial *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* are odour, noise and dust. Of particular concern in relation to open burning practices is dust – in the form of smoke – and odours resulting from such burning.

Dust

Dust – or smoke – in the air is defined as fine-grained suspended particulate. Whether people perceive dust as a nuisance or not will depend on the frequency, intensity and duration of the dust-generating event.

See also Nuisance Reference: [Dust](#)

Activities and Operations

Burning Alternatives

Whenever possible, alternatives to burning should be considered such as chipping wood materials to allow use as mulch or a compost amendment. Recycling of any combustible materials should be considered in place of burning whenever possible.

Grass Seed Residues

Grass seed producers may find it necessary to burn seed crop residue. Farmers in smoke-sensitive areas should take steps to minimize the duration of burns and ensuing smoke production.

Crop Residues

To replenish nutrients and to improve soil fertility and tilth, crop residues should be returned to the soil whenever possible. If crop residues cannot be baled or plowed into the soil, burning may be an allowable option. In all situations, best burning practices that minimize burn duration and smoke production should be followed.

Burning can inhibit weeds and plant diseases, reduce insect and rodent habitat, may reduce the risk of wildfire, and may make it easier for new plants to grow.

Biomass Burning in Boilers

Traditional fuel sources for boilers include natural gas and – in some cases – coal. These fuel sources can be replaced by biomass in the form of fuel products such as agricultural pellets, manure pellets, corn kernels, corn stalks, seed hulls or wood products. Fuel sources should not include raw manure, or paper or wood products that have been treated with glues, paints, preservatives, or any toxic substances. Salt-laden wood products should not be considered as a fuel source.

In all situations, regulations associated with standards for air emissions for biomass boilers, including the AEMCOP, must be followed.

Fuel Storage

Stack burning may require that a variety of fuel products be stored. Solid fuels such as wood or coal and liquid fuel such as petroleum may need to be stored in a safe manner on a farm site until required for use.

See also Farm Practice: [Storage of Hazardous Material](#)

Prunings

Orchard, berry and vineyard prunings must follow the *Environmental Management Act's* Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation. Instead of burning, many orchardists use flail mowers to mulch prunings or utilize local programs to assist with chipping or green waste disposal options.

Diseased Vegetative Debris

In some circumstances, burning may be the most suitable way to dispose of diseased vegetative debris. The Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation has provisions for producers to follow when burning diseased vegetative debris including verification of a specified pathogen or insect. In such cases, best burning practices should be followed and burn duration and smoke production should be minimized.

Spoiled Hay and Straw

Spoiled hay and straw may be returned to the land, composted, or given away.

Disposal of Refuse

The burning of refuse is not exempt from the *Environmental Management Act* unless it meets the requirements as outlined in the Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation.

Open Burning Prohibitions

The Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation prohibits the burning of the following materials:

- animal carcasses and waste from animal slaughtering;
- batteries;
- carpets;
- construction waste;
- electrical wire;
- fiberglass;
- furniture and appliances;
- used oil;
- tires;
- paint;
- hazardous waste;
- tar paper;
- treated or painted lumber;
- railway ties;
- manure;

- polystyrene foam;
- plastics;
- drywall;
- demolition waste;
- domestic waste;
- rubber;
- asphalt;
- asphalt products;
- fuel and lubricant containers; and
- biomedical waste.

Open Burning Best Management Practices

In circumstances where agricultural burning is necessary, management should follow best practices. Particulate emissions and pollution can be reduced by implementing the following practices to reduce smoke production:

- increasing fire intensity;
- minimizing the duration of the smoldering stage, as this phase can contribute more than half of the total particulate emitted during the burn;
- controlling the type of fuel used;
- ensuring that no contaminants are introduced to the pile;
- avoiding compaction of materials;
- allowing fuels to fully dry before burning;
- controlling the duration of burns;
- using forced air technology such as air curtain incineration or other appropriate air-assisting methodologies;
- avoiding combustion when smoke is unlikely to disperse properly such as during periods of calm stable air or when the venting index is poor;
- avoiding the overloading of fire piles that may restrict combustion and cause excessive smoldering and smoke generation;
- ensuring that fire attendees have equipment and water on hand appropriate to the type and size of fire; and
- following information as outlined in the *Wildfire Act* and Wildfire Regulation.

Related Farm Practices

Other farm practices that pertain to burning include the following:

Mortality Disposal

Mortalities associated with small livestock or poultry may be incinerated only in appropriate incinerators.

See also Farm Practice: [Mortality Disposal](#)

Land Clearing

Brush piles generated by land clearing may be burned but must follow the Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation.

Legislation

Agricultural producers are expected to follow all legislation that pertains to their farming operations. The provincial *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* stipulates that a “farm operation” must meet the *Public Health Act*, *Integrated Pest Management Act*, *Environmental Management Act* and the regulations under those Acts, as well as any land use regulation (amongst other requirements), to be protected from liability in nuisance, from being prevented from conducting that farm operation by court order, and from the application of certain local government bylaws. Local government bylaws may also apply to some farm practices, and farmers affected should contact their relevant local government for more information.

Some of the Acts, regulations, and bylaws that may be relevant to this topic may include the following:

Provincial Legislation

The *Environmental Management Act* protects land, water and air environments from “pollution” and “waste”, and regulates the handling and disposal of hazardous materials. Below is a list of some of the regulation(s) under this Act:

- The Code of Practice for Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) applies to all agricultural operations in British Columbia, from small hobby farms to large commercial operations and, among other things, regulates emissions from biomass fueled boilers and heaters, regulates the types of acceptable fuel and emissions from wood fired boilers, and sets emission standards, testing and reporting requirements for boilers and heaters.
- The Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation regulates open burning for agricultural purposes to ensure it is done with minimal risk to human and environmental health and minimizes smoke generation. Metro Vancouver has made bylaws regulating the discharge of air contaminants, including those from open burning or from agricultural boilers, within that Regional District, and may issue permits and approvals under those bylaws.

The *Wildfire Act* regulates open burning and other high-risk activities that may contribute to wildfires. For example, it prohibits open fires within one kilometer of “forest land” or “grass land”, except in circumstances prescribed by the Wildfire Regulation.

Local Government

Local fire departments, municipalities, improvement districts or regional districts may have specific bylaws on open burning. An example is Metro Vancouver’s Air Quality Management Bylaw No. 1082. In situations where local bylaws are more stringent than provincial regulations, the local bylaws take precedence.

If the bylaw was created as a fire bylaw, a farmer – regardless of whether their farm is located within or outside ALR boundaries – must comply. Variations on bylaw stipulations may be possible if a farmer obtains a Ministry of Environment and Parks permit and complies with the Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation. To obtain a permit, a farmer may, however, need to agree to burn in a more controlled manner than is typical for an open burn.

Generally, before open burning is done, all farmers should check with local authorities to see if local government bylaws affect burning activities. If a burning ban is in place, the ban takes precedence over any Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation exemptions.

Publications

Local, regional or provincial government agencies may have smoke management plans in place for reference to help farmers reduce impacts associated with burning practices. These can typically be found on applicable websites.

Publications that provide more information on burning include the following:

Open Burning Alternatives for Agricultural Producers in British Columbia
British Columbia Environmental Farm Plan Reference Guide