

Oregon legislator introduces bill to ban field burning

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Legislation emphasizes protecting the health of Oregonians

Salem — State Representative Paul Holvey (D-Eugene) stood up for the health of Oregonians today by rolling out House Bill 3000, a bill to prohibit field burning in Oregon.

HB 3000 protects public health by banning open-field, stack, and pile burning as well as propane flaming in Oregon. The bill transfers authority for managing the Smoke Management Program from the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Fees and fines collected from burning and compliance will be placed into Open Burning Management Account that will be used to finance DEQ program costs.

“Agricultural field burning constitutes a major threat to public health in Oregon,” Rep. Holvey said. “I introduced this legislation because it is my belief that the state needs to better protect Oregonians from the health impacts of fine particulates associated with agricultural field burning.”

“We have clear scientific evidence documenting the correlation between exposure to fine particulate matter and increased incidents of asthma, heart disease, and even premature death,” Rep. Holvey went on to say. “The air quality index and most methods used to measure particulate matter are very site specific. The data used throw out the worst impact days and are over longer periods than the actual smoke impacts a person’s health. And quite frankly people don’t breathe averages.”

Smoke produced from burning contains small particles called fine particulate matter abbreviated PM2.5. These toxicologically active particles enter deeply into the lungs and can result in health problems. Individuals with pre-existing conditions, like asthma and heart disease, children, and the elderly can experience medical complications from exposure to these fine particulates. However, there is no safe level and everyone is at risk from fine particulates. Increased medication use, emergency room visits, and even premature mortality can result from such exposure. Not only does field burning affect the medical costs to Oregonians, there are also negative costs to the tourism and recreation industries.

Oregon is one of the few western states that still allows field burning. Washington State completely abolished the practice in 1998. Since that time the amount of acreage being farmed and yields of grass seed have increased. The Ninth Circuit recently banned field burning in Idaho as a result of their non-compliance with the Federal Clean Air Act. Oregon is currently not in compliance with the Clean Air Act partly because of agricultural exemptions for burning and air quality.

The Oregon Medical Association, American Lung Association of Oregon, Lane Regional Air Protection Agency, the Oregon Lung Specialists, and many individuals from the health community have joined in calling for a ban on field-burning in Oregon. The bill has been referred to the House Committee on Health Care with subsequent referral to the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.

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