



# Silvicultural Burning in the Smoke Sensitive Area



## Background

An area of Spokane County is designated as a Smoke Sensitive Area. The Smoke Sensitive Area is prone to experience elevated pollution levels due to population density and/or geographical features that trap pollutants. In the Smoke Sensitive Area, fine smoke particles from outdoor burning can accumulate, affecting air quality, public health and visibility.

## The Smoke Sensitive Area

The Smoke Sensitive Area includes forested lands outside of Spokane County’s Urban Growth Area, where certain activities generate silvicultural debris, which must be processed or disposed in order to enhance forest health, prevent or abate fire hazards, or control disease. These activities are mainly: **Timber Harvesting**—a practice where a landowner derives income from the harvest of the trees. **Timber Stand Improvement**—a practice used to maintain a healthy stand of trees, such as pruning, pre-commercial thinning, insect/disease control, and clean up after a severe weather event.

**The Smoke Sensitive Area includes** the Spokane County Smoke Control Zone, Spokane County Former Nonattainment Areas, and these additional areas:

- |                            |                   |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Glenrose/Corkery           | Liberty Lake      |
| Newman Lake South          | Hazard/Dartford   |
| Little Spokane/Colbert     | Day-Mount Spokane |
| Cheney-Spokane/Latah Creek |                   |

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR), in cooperation with the Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency (Spokane Clean Air), evaluates forested land burn requests within the Smoke Sensitive Area. DNR may issue a written burn permit when a **fire hazard** is declared by a fire protection agency **and** when it is determined that there is **no practical alternative means** of abatement.

Landowners are expected to manage forest debris to prevent extreme fire hazards and to reduce the need to burn in the future, as permit renewals are not automatically issued each year. Failure to take such measures may result in the denial of a permit.

**Fire Hazard** — For an area to be declared an extreme fire hazard, it has to meet at least one of the following conditions:

- ✓ Hazard within one hundred feet from the closest edge of any public road.
- ✓ Hazard within one hundred feet from the closest edge of any private road used by the public to access an area of public use.
- ✓ Hazard within 200 feet and up to maximum of 500 feet to a campground, school, residence, or building valued at \$1,000 or more.
- ✓ Identification by the DNR as an area with high risk ignition, posing a threat to life and property.

**Practical Alternative Means** — The Washington Clean Air Act encourages more intense utilization of silvicultural practices to reduce the need for burning.



Landowners are therefore encouraged to use the following practical alternative means of abatement, listed in order of priority per state regulation (RCW 70.94.6538, formerly RCW 70.94.670):

1. **Slash production minimization** – this alternative has the highest level of priority as a practical alternative means of abatement.
2. **Slash utilization**
3. **Non-burning disposal options** (e.g. chipping, hauling, etc.)
4. **Silvicultural burning**

(over)



Chipping is another preferred method to reduce the need for burning.

## Contact DNR First

Landowners engaging in harvesting or timber stand improvement activities in the Smoke Sensitive Area should discuss their debris management plans with DNR staff **prior to** engaging in the activities which will generate debris. **Questions to be discussed ahead of time with DNR, include the following:**

1. What is the purpose of the activity (e.g., stand improvement, harvest, land conversion)?
2. Is the landowner aware that a permit may be denied or severely restricted by virtue of the parcel being in the Smoke Sensitive Area?
3. What minimization, utilization and disposal techniques can be practiced in order to generate the least amount of debris?
4. What practices will be employed to maximize the marketability of the material on the site?
5. What practices will be employed to prevent the establishment of an extreme fire hazard?

## Conditions To Meet Prior to DNR on-site Visit

DNR personnel will make an on-site visit for each request to burn in the Smoke Sensitive Area. The following critical conditions will be part of every burn permit issued for parcels in the Smoke Sensitive Area. **All of these conditions must be met by the landowner prior to DNR's on-site visit:**

1. Materials must be piled (work has already been performed).
2. Piles must be no larger than ten (10) feet in diameter by eight (8) feet in height.
3. Slash material must be cured. No Green Slash.
4. Piles must not contain dirt, stumps, or slash material five (5) inches or greater in diameter.

**Permit Requests May be Denied**—Below is a list of common reasons permits are denied:

1. Air quality concerns cannot be resolved (e.g., smoke intrusion problems)
2. The operation is not related to a Timber Harvest or a Timber Stand Improvement.
3. Alternate slash disposal methods have not been met.
4. An extreme fire hazard condition does not exist.
5. No work has been performed (e.g., no piles)
6. The piles are too large.
7. The slash is green.
8. The piles have dirt in them.
9. There are stumps and slash materials five (5) inches or greater in diameter in the piles.

**Questions? Contact DNR (Colville) at 509-685-6900 or  
Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency at 477-4727.**



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**Natural Resources**



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