

History of the CRB Program

Idaho's Crop Residue Burning (CRB) program has a long and rather troubled history. Litigation challenging the basic rule allowing for crop residue burning resulted in a court decision and follow-on ban of such burning in Idaho in 2007. Governor Otter called for the growers and activists to join with state regulators to negotiate a solution that would allow crop residue burning while protecting public health from smoke impacts. The negotiation process began in earnest in July 2007.

Central parties to these discussions included representatives from Safe Air for Everyone (SAFE), Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Coeur d'Alene, Kootenai, and Nez Perce tribes, and numerous farm organizations and farmers who burn crop residue. Several meetings were held to identify the issues and find common ground. The goal was to design a program that was protective of public health and transparent to the public and that restored the use of fire as a tool for the agricultural community. After several months of discussion, an independent mediator was hired to assist in the negotiations between the stakeholders, and on December 19, 2007, the groups reached an agreement.

Following are key points of the agreement for the new crop residue burning program:

- Designate DEQ to administer the crop residue burning program
- Model the program after the Nez Perce Tribe Program, specifically to protect air quality to 75% of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS)
- Incorporate the transparency aspects of the Washington State Department of Ecology program,
- Examine the adequacy of the existing monitoring network
- Build in cooperation with other smoke management regulators
- Conduct monitoring and exposure studies if grant money is available
- Conduct an air quality analysis prior to authorizing the annual open burning of 20,000 acres or more of bluegrass

Through the first half of 2008, Idaho amended its statutes and air quality rules to reflect the agreement and satisfy the court decision in order to allow the CRB program to move forward. DEQ developed a CRB Operating Guide to serve as the main program's main smoke management implementation tool. The guide describes the overall and day-to-day operation in detail. Since the CRB program was designed to be dynamic, the guide is reviewed and improved each year as DEQ and stakeholders gain expertise through experience with and refinement of forecast tools.

Approval of DEQ's CRB program by EPA was effective September 1, 2008, but since that date fell on a holiday, the first day DEQ was authorized to approve a burn was September 2, 2008. Registrations were accepted online and by hard copy starting August 1, 2008.

Overall, DEQ considered the first burn season in the fall of 2008 a success. Statewide, approximately 78% of the acres that were registered and paid for were burned. In 2008, about two-thirds of the total acres burned statewide were in north Idaho. In 2011, about two-thirds of the total acres burned statewide were in south Idaho. At the end of every year, DEQ evaluates the burn seasons and recommends improvements that will help the program operate more effectively and efficiently without sacrificing the protection of human health.