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# Field burning ban debate will continue tonight

## House Bill 3000 failed in May, so opponents of field burning seek out alternative options

**By: Jason Reed**

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When state legislators tried to pass a field burning ban in May, their efforts were extinguished when House Bill 3000 failed to make it to the floor for a vote, but those efforts to stop the burning have not been abandoned.

### At a glance

Where: St. Peter's Catholic Church, located at 1150 Maxwell Rd., west of River Road.

When: 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

More information: Contact Oregon Toxics Alliance Executive Director Lisa Arkin at 541-465-8860.

The Oregon Toxics Alliance will host a town hall meeting at 7 p.m. tonight to focus on the health concerns of field burning, hear stories by those affected by the smoke, and open the floor to a question-and-answer session with Eugene City Councilor Mike Clark. Lane County commissioners are expected to attend.

Members of the political action group were among the leaders advocating the bill's passage in the spring. Now they are once again on the move to make sure people don't forget about the negative health effects just because the summer is over and the dark-brown smoke no longer presses against the horizon.

"The most obvious impacts are on those with asthma or emphysema who have to leave town or shut themselves up in their home to avoid the smoke," said John Herberg, an administrative assistant for the Oregon Toxics Alliance. "The less obvious impact is the release of particulate matter the fires release into the air. Our lungs can't filter out this matter, and it increases the chance for cardiac arrest, heart failure and respiratory problems."

The House bill was intended to prohibit open field burning - a ban that already exists in Washington state - but grass seed growers in the Willamette Valley said the practice protects their crops against disease and fungus.

During the last couple of decades there have been a number of reductions on the amount of acreage growers are allowed to burn each season. By putting an end to field burning, growers complained they would not be able to produce the high-quality product the region is famous for.

Oregon, specifically the Willamette Valley, hosts a number of heavyweights in the grass seed business, and Linn County even boasts the title of "The Grass Seed Capital of the World."

These growers hold significant influence in state politics, but health groups such as the American Lung Association, and activist groups such as the Oregon Toxics Alliance aren't backing down in their fight to stop field burning in Oregon.

While there ultimately exists another chance to win the field burning battle in the legislature this February, not all parties involved are convinced that this is the best place to pursue the next course of action.

"With the legislature and the administrative branches failing to protect people's health, there's always the option of going to the judicial branch to protect people's rights," said Charlie Tebbutt, a staff attorney for the Western Environmental Law Center.

The law center has been working with Lane County commissioners to discuss the legal options to stop field burning. While Tebbutt would not say if there is going to be a lawsuit filed against the state to stop field burning, he did say, "We believe there are strong opportunities to protect public health through the courts."

[jreed@dailyemerald.com](mailto:jreed@dailyemerald.com)

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