Airshed management in the region is becoming more and more of an issue as we look to maintaining and improving the quality of air we breathe. One very important part of this issue is managing smoke on agricultural, forestry and non-agricultural lands in a way that reduces impact on health and safety issues.

Good smoke management is contingent on a strong understanding of the interrelationships between smoke, the weather and geological features in the area. The need for a better understanding of these relationships has been aptly demonstrated during these last few weeks in The Dalles area with the strong inversion that has settled over the Gorge.

Inversions, which occur during calm, cool periods when the air near the soil surface is cooler than the air above it. The warm air on top blocks the air near the soil from moving up. The result has been that smoke from fires including backyard leaf fires instead of going up into the atmosphere and dispersing hangs thick in the gorge close to the ground. Inversions are common in the gorge particularly in the fall and winter months. Folks who are planning to burn should understand that when inversions occur you should not burn on those days. You should wait until there is some air movement to help dilute and disperse the smoke. There is a simple test that folks can use to check for inversion conditions. Conduct a small test burn, and watch the smoke rise. If it rises not more than 15-20 feet before it spreads out, you most likely have an inversion condition, which means you should not burn that day.

There is now good information concerning current wind conditions that is available on the web that will be very helpful as you make your decision to burn. Sites include: http://www.agriculture.com/agweather/maps/windsp.html, or, six hourly wind forecasts for your area at “Weather Underground” http://wunderground.com).

To help folks both those in farming and those who just want to burn a pile of brush better understand good burning practices, Wasco and Sherman County offices of OSU Extension, Natural Resource Conservation Service, DEQ, Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Wasco County Wheat Growers will be sponsoring a workshop on Smoke Management. This workshop is open to all in the Mid-Columbia and will be held January 20th at The Dalles Discovery Center from 1 to 4:30 pm. There is no charge for this workshop. For further information, please contact the Wasco County Extension Office at 541-296-5494 or the Sherman County Extension Office at 541-565-3230 or the Wasco Soil and Water Conservation District at 541-298-8559 ext 3 for more information.