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Senate approves ramp-down of field burning *SB 528 will help address public health and safety issues*

SALEM – The ongoing phase out of field burning in the Willamette Valley was pushed along this afternoon with the passage of SB 528. The bill creates a reduction of field burning of grass seed and cereal grain crops in Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Marion, Polk, Yamhill, Linn, Benton, and Lane Counties. Open field burning is eliminated in 2010 with exceptions for burning on steep terrain and for identified grass seed species.

“Field burning is antiquated and poses significant health risks,” said Senator Floyd Prozanski (D-Eugene), chief sponsor of the bill with Representative Paul Holvey in the House. “Too many people have suffered for too long by the smoke that gets trapped in the valley. This causes serious public safety risks and health problems for many Oregonians.”

Large plumes of smoke can create serious danger for drivers on surrounding roads. In 1988, eleven people were killed and 37 were injured in a crash caused by smoke from field burning that obstructed the vision of drivers on Interstate 5 outside of Albany.

The health risks associated with smoke from field burning are also well-documented. Oregonians who suffer from cardiovascular disease, the elderly, and children are particularly affected by the fine particulates released with field burning.

“I’ve seen first-hand how field burning can make life miserable for people suffering from asthma and I cannot justify how we could continue this practice,” said Senator Vicki Walker (D-Eugene). “There are agricultural alternatives readily available that are safer for the public and less disruptive to the surrounding environment.”

The practice of field burning to remove leftover straw and stubble on fields has been used by farmers for over 50 years. Particularly in the grass seed industry, it is used to control weeds, insects and plant diseases, and helps maintain grass seed purity. Modern approaches have supplanted the need for most farmers to burn, including using the debris for cellulosic ethanol. Additionally, many farmers have turned to cutting and baling the stubble for straw for [as opposed to burning the entire field.

“It’s time to resume our transition to banning field burning once and for all,” said Senator Alan Bates (D-

Ashland). “It’s been almost 20 years since the Legislature addressed field burning and the problem hasn’t gotten any better. The fields are still burning and people are still suffering.”

Field burning has also caused serious disruptions to industry in Oregon, with dense smoke and high heat caused by field burning leading to short-circuits and lapses in power lines that supply electricity to major manufacturers in the Willamette Valley, like Hewlett-Packard in Corvallis.

The bill will now go to the House for consideration.

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