

A BURNING ISSUE

Information about agricultural pile burning permits for citrus

By Ryan Atwood

Agricultural pile burning is defined as the burning of vegetative material originating on site (grew there) in conjunction with the cultivation of land, including gardening or horticulture, fruit growing, raising of vegetables, trees, shrubs, plants, pastures or rangeland, and similar products. The Florida Division of Forestry (DOF) regulates all burning permits throughout the state. A landowner or contractor who would like to burn for agricultural purposes can request a burn permit from the DOF. Approval depends on the current weather conditions for the local area.

There are special designations that allow one to qualify for an agricultural or land clearing pile burn permit when the general public cannot. Two of these designations are citrus spot burner and certified pile burner. The citrus spot burner designation is for a landowner who has contacted the DOF and has had a local forester inspect and approve the burn location on his or her property. Any pile burning will take place only in this pre-determined area. The advantage of the citrus spot burning permit is the ability to burn on days when the general public cannot.

A certified pile burner is someone who has undergone training and the certification process for pile burning on others' properties. This designation is for someone who burns more than 20 days out of the year. The advantages of

having the certified pile burner designation are the ability to burn on days when the general public cannot and longer hours to burn piles (start earlier and finish later with regional forester permission).

Revisions to the state statutes regarding pile burning are being submitted for the 2008 legislative session. If these revisions are accepted, certified pile burners would have civil liability protection as long as they were following procedures of the administrative code. This would be similar to the current protection that is provided prescribed burners.

Some confusion has been expressed about the difference between the two designations and which status would be appropriate. For those individuals looking to burn piles solely in their groves, the citrus spot burning permit is ideal. For the contractor clearing land or working on others' properties that do not have an approved spot burning site assigned, then the certified pile burner designation would be beneficial. There may be times in which a citrus spot burner would have permission to burn whereas a certified pile burner would not and vice versa, depending upon location and weather conditions. The decision of when and where burn permits are issued is made at the regional level by the DOF. The DOF is currently considering, and most likely will offer, only one designation in the future — the certified pile burner program. For more information on certification courses, please visit: http://www.fl-dof.com/training_education/training_schedule.html.