



The burning issue

Grass-seed farmers won't need to use machines like these when they burn their fields, if they succeed in their drive to pass a bill removing state and federal acreage limitations. Emerald photo

Oregon grass-seed farmers field a defense

By GREG WASSON
Of the Emerald

Field burning is once more a legislative issue. Thursday, representatives of the grass seed industry argued their case before the Joint Committee on Trade and Economic Development, the committee that will act first on any burning bill.

The growers presented their legislation, S.B. 472, which removes state statute setting acreage limitations on open-burning and significantly reduces federal ability to regulate their activity.

Grass-seed farmers torch some of their fields each year to kill weeds, bugs and diseases. The resulting smoke sometimes finds its way into Eugene.

Bob Davis, main lobbyist for the growers, defends removal of all acreage limitations, saying farmers understand not being able to burn because of the weather.

"But what they don't understand is an arbitrary limit which is nothing more than fluff," he says. "What we're really interested in is clean air and clean air is decided on a daily basis."

State law currently limits burn-

ing to 180,000 acres each summer.

Federal intervention will likely play a major role in this session's burning battle. The Environmental Protection Agency has refused to ratify burning modifications

adopted by the 1977 session. The changes favor growers, and according to Rep. Grattan Kerans, D-Eugene, if the feds get tough, they can force mitigation. Mitigation dictates that when pollution from one source increases,

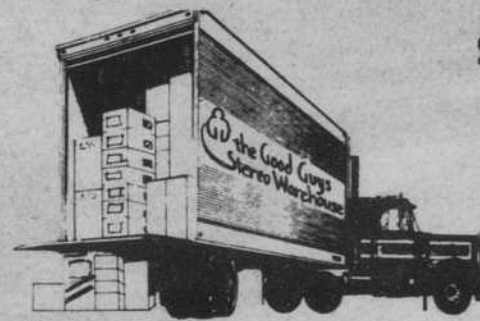
poisons pumped out by others must decrease.

"This means," says Kerans, "that the 400 or so burners in the Willamette Valley would be able to pollute and Lane County's economic base would suffer."

Weyerhaeuser and Georgia-Pacific and all the other industries of the Eugene-Springfield area would have to reduce their output."

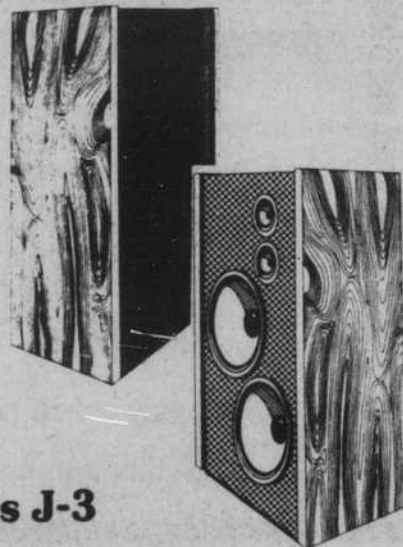
The next hearing on the bill is scheduled for March 1.

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