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Fall Treatment of Tobacco Beds with Methyl Bromide

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AGRONOMY NOTES

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FALL TREATMENT OF TOBACCO BEDS WITH METHYL BROMIDE

Treating tobacco beds with methyl bromide for the purpose of killing weed seed has become very popular in recent years. The gas is effective except on the seed of white clover and when the soil temperature is below 50° F.

Preparation

Plow the area to be treated and smooth it down in advance. Work the soil to a fine, loose condition just before treatment. The gas penetrates only as deep as the soil is properly worked. Soil must be moist, but not wet, for the most effective kill.

The gas is applied under a plastic cover at three or more points in the bed. Therefore, the cover needs to be supported a few inches above the soil so that the gas can move over the bed. For the supports, make two or three rows of low mounds of plant bed soil the length of the bed and about 5 feet apart. After treatment, rake these mounds back into place.

Cold Treatment

Since methyl bromide is a liquid, provide evaporating pans to catch the liquid. Three lengths of plastic tubing, one for each pan, are provided with the applicator. Jiffy applicators can also be used for this purpose. If tubing is used, anchor it in the evaporating pan so the pressure from the cans will not dislodge it.

Unfold or unroll the cover on top of the bed supports beginning at the end toward the wind. Seal down the ends of the cover completely with soil in a trench provided for this purpose. Seal thoroughly! A poorly-sealed cover may let gas escape and result in poor weed control. Release 9 pounds of gas for a bed 100' x 9'

(To simplify information in this publication, trade names of some products are used. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not named.)

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and 12 pounds for a bed 100' x 12'. Do not preheat the cans of methyl bromide for this treatment.

Leave the cover on the bed for at least 2 days.

Hot Treatment

Proceed as for the cold treatment, except you won't need evaporating pans. Place tubes at each end and in the middle of the bed, then cover with plastic. Heat at least 2½ gallons of water to a temperature of 160° F, or "hog-scalding" hot. Puncture the gas can in an upright position, then lower it into the hot water. Only a liquified gas should come out under the cover. It will take 3 to 5 minutes to release each can of methyl bromide.

Leave the cover on the bed for at least 6 hours depending on air temperature and soil moisture. DO NOT PREHEAT CANS!

Care of Treated Beds

Ditch beds thoroughly to prevent weed seeds and diseases from being washed into the bed. A light raking next spring is all that is needed. Mulches may be used if available - plastic, old canvas which has been washed, straw if clean, and others.

Precautions

Methyl bromide is a poisonous gas, and its vapors are extremely hazardous. Therefore, you should observe the following precautions:

Do not spill it.

Do not breathe the vapor.

Do not preheat the cans.

Make sure all connections on the applicator are tight and working properly.

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