

Appeal Tribune

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2019 ■ SILVERTONAPPEAL.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Arsenic found in Victor Point drinking water

Tracy Loew
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Students and staff at Silverton's Victor Point Elementary School are being supplied with bottled water following the discovery of unsafe amounts of arsenic in the school's well water.

A sample of drinking water collected Sept. 10 showed arsenic levels at 26.5 parts per billion, more than twice the federal safe drinking water standard of 10 ppb.

A previous sample, taken July 24, showed arsenic levels at 17.6 ppb, also above the federal action level.

The district got the results of the second test on Sept. 17, and released a letter notifying the community on Sept. 23.

In their letter, district officials said that while arsenic levels are above the federal safe drinking water standard, they are below the state-set level, of 35 ppb, known to cause acute harm.

That means there's not an immediate health hazard, but drinking the water for a long period of time could cause health problems.

The water still is safe for washing hands, dishes and other surfaces, district officials said.

District spokesman Derek McElfresh said officials waited to tell the community about the problem until they received results of the follow-up sample, because the first sample was taken during the summer when the building was unoccupied.

"When the building is shut down like that and you don't have a lot of water use, sometimes you can have levels that spike," said Lorin Stanley, the district's maintenance and facilities director. "As soon as water use resumes, they go down."

The school year started Sept. 3, with teachers and other staff returning in late August.

Oregon requires quarterly testing following a sample with high arsenic levels, and uses a running annual average of those samples to determine whether a water system must take action, said Greg DeBlase, an en-

vironmental health specialist for the Marion County Health Department who has been working with the district.

The state doesn't require public notification.

But the district decided to do a second sample right away, McElfresh said, and to tell the public soon after the results were in.

"In the interest of the safety of the students, we decided it was better to take another sample now, get a confirmation, and implement some fixes," he said.

The Oregon Health Authority's drinking water database shows that Victor Point had an additional test with a high arsenic level, of 12.3 ppb, in September 2007.

Arsenic has been identified in all but one of the school's other drinking water tests over the past 15 years, but levels have been below the federal limit.

The school district is working with Marion County and the Health Authority to figure out next steps,

See **ARSENIC**, Page 2A

Side by side: Runner helps special needs teammate to finish

Pete Martini Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Earlier this month at Bush's Pasture Park, Shannon Campbell anxiously watched as hundreds of high school boys and girls ran in a cross country meet.

Her son, Jackson, was among them.

But as she took pictures of Jackson on the course, Shannon noticed the same boy running alongside Jackson, a boy she didn't know.

She finally shouted to the unknown runner, "What is your name?"

"Mihir," the runner yelled back.

Who was Mihir, and why was he running with her son?

Thirty minutes later, she would find out.

Jackson Campbell's condition

Jackson Campbell was born with Arnold Chiari brain malformation, a condition where a portion of the cerebellum comes out the base of the skull a little farther than usual.

Jackson also has a general cognitive disability that is unrelated to the brain malformation.

"He's just got cognitive delay," she said. "And so different subjects are strengths, and others are weaknesses."

Decision to go out for cross country

Jackson has always been a sociable kid, but his parents have been looking for ways to get him more engaged with other high school students.

"With his disability, sometimes he gravitates toward younger peers because that's who he connects with the most," Shannon said.

Jackson joins the team

When Jackson joined the team, he immediately made an impression on the coaching staff.

Cross country is a no-cut sport in high school, and with so many participants at so many skill levels, the team atmosphere is inviting.



Jackson Campbell, left, and Mihir Joshi run together at the Saxon Invite cross country meet at Bush's Pasture Park in Salem on Sept. 7.

SHANNON CAMPBELL / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

"In meeting Jackson, he's very charismatic and outgoing and wants to be there and (you) can tell that he wants to connect with people," South Salem assistant coach Robert Salberg said. "I think the running environment, especially cross country, is unique for that because everybody is at different levels of fitness and levels of ability."

Even though Jackson had an outgoing personality, Salberg said he noticed early on that he was negative

See **RUNNER**, Page 3A

A breath of fresh(er) air

Zach Urness Salem Statesman Journal | USA
TODAY NETWORK

After two wildfire-filled seasons, Oregonians got a chance to catch their breath this summer.

Oregon's fire season was the mildest since 2004 and the least expensive since 2010, according to statistics from the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center.

Statewide, wildfires burned just 67,795 acres this year compared to 883,405 acres a year ago. Cost also plummeted, dropping to \$58 million this year compared to a record-high \$530 million in 2018.

"This year was a relief," said Dana Skelly, wildfire fuels manager for the U.S. Forest Service. "We had two really long and difficult years. It was nice to have a break."

One reason for the lack of wildfires was that Oregon's forests never dried out to the level of the past two years, thanks to cooler temperatures and greater humidity, especially in the mountains.

Even when wildfires ignited, "we never had a fire environment that was set up for explosive growth," Skelly said.

Fire danger is measured based on the "energy release component" in forests — how hot a forest is likely to burn. Three of the past five years, Oregon has been at the highest level of danger, while this year, "we were average or even below average most of the year," Skelly said.

Another factor was that when Oregon had major lighting events, which occurred multiple times this summer, the systems came with rain.

"A lot of systems came with either significant moisture or were followed up with a wetting rain that was enough to quell most wildfire activity," Skelly said.

The highest-profile wildfire of the summer was the Highway 97 Fire, which burned along Interstate-5, grew to 13,119 acres and briefly brought hazardous air quality to southwest Oregon before full containment by fire teams.

The season's largest fire was the 23,400-acre POKER Fire remote southeast Oregon.

Fire teams also employed an aggressive strategy during lightning events, putting firefighters in place during lightning storms, patrolling and snuffing out fires while they were small.

"We like to have smokejumpers available because often we get a lot of lightning on the crest of the Cascades, which is primarily wilderness and we can more rapidly deploy smokejumpers and sometimes rappellers into the wilderness than having ground crews hike in," Deschutes National Forest spokeswoman Jean Nelson-Dean said in August.

Allowing a few wildfires to burn?

The light season provided some opportunity to allow wildfires to burn, but it mostly occurred in Eastern Oregon.

The Granite Gulch Fire, for example, was allowed to burn 5,555 acres, in a controlled way, in northeast Oregon's Eagle Cap Wilderness.

"The best way to describe it is a 'managed fire,' because while we're not putting it out, we do check it with water drops to make sure it's staying where we want it," said Nathan Goodrich, zone fire management officer for Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in August. "By doing it that way, it really has been a great fire throughout its lifespan."

Goodrich said that after decades of suppression, the fire, and others like it, helped restore more natural conditions that could limit more catastrophic fires

See **WILDFIRES**, Page 3A



An air unit drops fire retardant gel over the Milepost 97 Fire on July 25.

DOUGLAS FOREST PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION

Rents set to jump in 2020

Jonathan Bach Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Renters paying \$970 a month to live in the average two-bedroom Salem-area apartment could see their rent jump to a maximum of \$1,066 next year. That's assuming the apartment is 15 years or older and is subject to Oregon's new statewide rent control law, which lawmakers passed in February.

Landlords can raise rents by 9.9% in 2020 thanks to the rent control law spearheaded by Oregon Democrats. The Oregon Department of Administrative Services on Wednesday released next year's rate, which ticks down slightly from 2019's 10.3% cap. Under state law, the rate combines annual Consumer Price Index changes with a flat increase of 7%. Landlords don't have to raise rates all the way to the state-sanctioned ceiling.

Oregon is in the midst of a housing crunch. Still, the rent control law won't likely limit fresh housing sup-

ply because of the 15-year exemption and fairly broad latitude given to landlords for increasing rents, according to the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis. The economic analysis office did raise concerns about the rent cap or construction exemption constricting in the future.

Josh Lehner, an economist with the economic analysis office, told the Statesman Journal that with the "relatively high cap," Oregon rents aren't likely to increase by the maximum allowable rate "across the board."

"Some units will see the maximum," Lehner said by email. "Anecdotally, I have had a dozen or so phone calls this month from landlords looking for the figure, trying to see if they can get it before the Sept 30th reporting deadline. But how widespread the maximum will be applied, only time will tell."

Contact reporter Jonathan Bach by email at jbach@statesmanjournal.com or by phone at 503-399-6714. Follow him on Twitter at @jonathanmbach.

Online at SilvertonAppeal.com

News updates: ■ Breaking news ■ Get updates from the Silverton area

Photos: ■ Photo galleries

Vol. 138, No. 41

Serving the Silverton Area Since 1880

A Unique Edition of the Statesman Journal



©2019 50 cents
Printed on recycled paper