

Appeal Tribune

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LABOR DAY FIRES



'THESE AREN'T JUST ONE TIME EVENTS'



Disaster prompts changes in fire fighting

Claire Withycombe
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

When the three firefighters arrived one evening this July, the situation was worse than they expected. • The firefighters from Jackson County Fire District No. 5 had gotten a report of a vehicle on fire. Instead, the crew found two recreational vehicles ablaze – and the fire was dangerously close to a gas station, a trailer park and a truck stop. • A second crew from the district, sensing from experience that the first crew might need help, wasn't far behind. Together the six firefighters started fighting the fire, which was burning within the scar of the Almeda Fire, one of the many wildfires that tore across the state last September, searing itself into state history. • Two miles away, at milepost 21 of Interstate 5, more firefighting crews from Oregon and California were at the ready. The California Office of Emergency Services engines had been positioned nearby that day due to elevated fire risk, according to the Oregon State Fire Marshal's office. • Some firefighters soon arrived, and with 29 people fighting the fire, it took about 30 minutes to put it out, said Charles Hanley, chief of Jackson County Fire District No. 5.

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MAIN PHOTO: Damage to power lines from wildfire in the Santiam Canyon on Sept. 9, 2020, in Mill City.
TOP RIGHT: The Lionshead Fire in the Mount Jefferson wilderness.
MIDDLE RIGHT: Riverside Fire from La Dee Flats Area.
BOTTOM RIGHT: A burned SUV following the Beachie Creek Fire on Wednesday, Sept. 9, 2020. ABIGAIL DOLLINS / STATESMAN JOURNAL/US FOREST SERVICE/INCIWEB/ABIGAIL DOLLINS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Oregon's wildfires are not going anywhere fast

Wesley Lapointe Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

This season's wildfires have already surpassed the average number of acres burned over the last decade and the calendar hasn't even reached September, typically a busy month for wildland firefighters.

Thus far, 909,358 acres have burned in the Northwest. The 10-year average is 890,063 acres.

State and federal officials said this week the current fires are not likely to shrink anytime soon.

"In the absence of any sort of large-scale wetting rain event, we do expect the fires in the southern Cascades to

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PGE wants to raise rates to pay for wildfire resiliency

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The largest power company in Oregon is asking the state's regulatory body to allow it to raise rates for residential customers and small business owners.

It wants to raise about \$59 million per year, which it said would go toward improvements to its distribution system in case of wildfires and weather events.

If Portland General Electric is given approval for the 2.9% rate increase by the Public Utilities Commission, it would raise costs for the approximately 900,000 customers it serves in northwest Oregon in 51 cities between Salem and Portland by about \$7.44 per month starting in May.

And some customers are already raising concerns. "It is an inappropriate policy to shift costs onto residential customers, and business and industrial customers are getting too good of a deal," Adam Gretzinger, a PGE customer from Beaverton, said during a public hearing Wednesday.

PGE currently bills 6.329 cents per kilowatt hour and 7.051 cents over 1,000 kilowatt hours for residential customers and small businesses.

Commercial customers pay a higher cost for electricity on a scale determined by how much they use, and the time of day they use it, but generally pay about a third of what residential customers do, according to



Portland General Electric crews finish repairing a power line near Faragate Street and Brown Island Road in south Salem on Sunday, Oct. 16, 2016, following a storm the night before. ANIELLE PETERSON / STATESMAN JOURNAL

data from PGE.

The wildfires of 2020 knocked out power to more than 200,000 PGE customers, and 421,000 customers lost power during the ice storms in February.

PGE customer Gavin Little lost power for 12 days in the past year due to wildfires and ice storms. He said the burden of paying for power increases is being un-

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Sheriff wants COVID-19 enforcement handled locally

Virginia Barreda Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Marion County Sheriff's Office deputies will continue to advocate for education on renewed mask mandates from the Governor's Office instead of citing or arresting people for not following the order.

Sheriff Joe Kast published a letter to the community Aug. 20 that said, in part:

"My office is committed to encouraging our community members to make educated decisions to protect the health and safety of our residents and visitors in Marion County," the letter states. "This is something we can accomplish, not through mandates, but with communication, compassion and while respecting the different beliefs of our diverse community."

Sheriff spokesperson Sgt. Jeremy Landers said Kast made the statement based in part on open letters from at least three other sheriffs taking aim at Gov.

Kate Brown's recent mask mandates and vaccination orders following rising cases and hospitalizations driven by the more contagious delta variant.

"The concern from community members is that law enforcement will become the mask police," he said.

Kast's position remains unchanged, Landers said, pointing to a statement last November during the state-wide "Freeze" that asked residents to report COVID-19-related violations to agencies such as the Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division.

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