

Fog causes nine-car crash, closed westbound I-84 Tuesday

By Jayson Jacobsy
WesCom News Service

Snowplow drivers were able to keep Interstate 84 generally clear during a snowstorm Monday morning in the Blue Mountains, in part by spreading salt on the road.

But crews can't melt fog. Dense fog, a common phenomenon on the Cabbage Hill grade near Pendleton, was the culprit in a crash that involved nine vehicles and led to the westbound lanes of the freeway being closing for most of the day.

The chain reaction incident, which happened about 10:39 a.m., involved three commercial trucks and six passenger vehicles, said Oregon State Police Capt. Timothy R. Fox.

Travelers reported that one vehicle might have stalled, causing traffic to stop and leading to the series of collisions, Fox said.

"At this time investigators have not been able to identify the reported disabled vehicle," Fox wrote in an email to the Herald

on Tuesday.

Two people were taken to the hospital in Pendleton with serious injuries, and five cars and one truck had to be towed, Fox said.

The crash affected only the westbound lanes. Those lanes were initially closed between Milepost 216 near Pendleton and La Grande, but the closure was later extended first to Baker City and then to Ontario as most parking spaces for trucks were taken in La Grande and Baker City, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

Crews were starting to reopen the westbound lanes Monday afternoon around 3 o'clock, and allowing stranded vehicles to start moving past the crash site, when they learned that a second crash, involving at least two trucks, had happened about two miles to the east, said Tom Strandberg, an ODOT spokesman in La Grande.

Visibility was so poor — estimated at 50 to 75 feet at times — that emergency crews weren't immediately

aware of the second crash, Strandberg said.

That second crash kept the westbound lanes for a few more hours, he said.

ODOT was able to keep the eastbound lanes open throughout Monday, despite snow falling much of the day.

Crews spread salt on the freeway to prevent snow and ice from accumulating, and that tactic, which ODOT started using last winter on the freeway between Boardman and the Idaho border, was successful, Strandberg said.

"I was told the road wasn't slick (at the time of the chain reaction crash)," he said. "Ice was not a factor as far as what I've been told."

Strandberg said ODOT drivers continued to use salt until later Monday, when temperatures plummeted into the teens, making the salt less effective.

Fog, by contrast, is a hazard for which there is no effective control, and it often forms on Cabbage Hill, the 6-percent grade that stretches for several miles.

TEENS

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tified MyPI instructor, who also serves as a 4-H Educational Program assistant, will teach the course. Dixon believes it is important to include young people in disaster training.

"Our teens are capable of so much more than they are given credit for. We often neglect to include teens in disaster preparedness, and we tend to overlook the fact that they have energy and vision that adults sometimes lack," she said.

MyPI's Oregon website, mypioregon.org, calls the program a "progressive approach

to preparing youth for emergencies and disasters." As in other MyPI classes, the training in Oregon will be conducted with an emphasis placed on learning by doing.

"We plan on providing as much hands-on training as possible," Lou Gerber said.

Union County teens interested in taking the class may attend an introductory session from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Feb. 16 at the Blue Mountain Conference Center, 404 12th St., La Grande. They will be able to sign up for the class at this time. Teens can also sign up before the orientation. For information on obtaining applications call Gerber at 541-786-8306.

HANSELL

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would still leave it up to the respective counties to make the decision if they want to rezone all 50 acres.

"If a county is below a certain population and has not grown economically, they will be able to do some land use planning differences in order to attract businesses," Hansell said.

Courtney and Hansell may seem like an unlikely pair. They are major leaders in parties on the opposite sides of the aisle. They also represent opposite sides of the state. Hansell said bipartisanship is important, especially now that Democrats have a supermajority.

"For me to pass any bills, it's going to be a lot easier if my bills are bipartisan," Hansell said. "We work across the aisle for the betterment of Oregon."

He also mentioned that he hopes his bills will be considered for their merit and not solely on the party affiliation of the sponsor.

"If they're good bills, they make sense and they help rural Oregon, they should be passed," Hansell said.

One of the other major legislative priorities Hansell mentioned is a bill he brought forth at the behest of the City of La Grande. He said city officials told him of troubles getting electrical inspectors to come to the far eastern side of the state.

"In rural Oregon, there isn't a big enough community to have a full-fledged department for all the electrical and plumbing inspections," Hansell said.

The bill's description reads: "Allows municipality with building inspection program that includes administration and enforcement of electrical code to use contracted electrical inspectors."

Hansell plans on staying busy throughout the session and hopes his constituents will reap the benefits of the bills he is working to get passed. But, he said, passing a bill isn't always a clean process.

"Sometimes the sausage making down here is not very pretty," he said.

SAR

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find and rescue them. There really is no immediate alternative to search and rescue."

Union County's search and rescue team collects about \$5,000 per year in donations, which make up the bulk of their funding, but they also receive \$2,500 from the Union County Sheriff's Office's annual budget, according to Fred Hawkins, a search operations manager and past SAR captain. Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen said he allocates more funds to SAR whenever he can.

"If we have additional resources at the end of the year, sometimes I'll help them out with a snowmobile or a four-wheeler," he said.

Most of SAR's expenses involve replacing or maintaining equipment essential to the team's operations,

and volunteers are reimbursed for fuel. Vora said the county's SAR is looking to replace one of their three-quarter ton trucks soon, which would cost around \$20,000, according to Hawkins.

However, Vora is hoping to save money on repair and maintenance once the construction of a new SAR equipment building is finished. The building will be located on land donated by the City of La Grande near B&K Auto Salvage & Recycling on Highway 203. While they haven't broken ground yet, Vora and Hawkins both said they hope to begin construction this spring.

Although all labor will be completed at no cost by SAR volunteers, Hawkins said building materials will add up to about \$50,000. But once it's finished, the building will shelter the equipment



Courtesy photo

Brent Kerns, second from right, leads the training session concerning Avalanche Probes, Digital Transceiving Systems and other recovery techniques at a February training session.

from the elements, saving money in repair costs in the long run.

"At this point in time, we're keeping our equipment at the county public works shops," Vora said. "We've been saving for the last

to name the building "Ralph's Place" in his memory.

Wilson was only one of the many volunteers who give their time to the county's search and rescue efforts. Vora hopes House Bill 2503 will eventually lead to the state funding a portion of SAR's operations, in order to better support volunteers.

"The Sheriff's Office and the county definitely support us to the extent that they're able to, but search and rescue is an expensive (operation) and right now our volunteers essentially do things out of the goodness of their heart — provide their own equipment and pay for all of their own training," Vora said. "As we get more funds, being able to pay to send volunteers to training or bring instructors to us would be hugely valuable."

COVE

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Councilor Lana Shira mentioned the sidewalk ordinance refers to the nuisance ordinance multiple times and because she and a number of other councilors hadn't read the nuisance ordinance they didn't have adequate information.

As the talks progressed, Little brought up how the current nuisance ordinance has no way to be enforced. Without a municipal court, no fines can be placed on any individual who refuses to comply with the nuisance ordinance. Little said he spoke with Elgin about possibly having an intergovernmental agency agreement allowing Cove to use Elgin's municipal court to settle disputes. A number of councilors were worried about taking property owners to court. McCowan called it a "big change for a very small town like Cove." No decision was made or motion passed about the potential use of a municipal court.

Earlier in the meeting, the council

heard from Cindy Edwards, chair of the Cove Community Association — which puts on the Cherry Fair — who spoke about the 20th anniversary of this iteration of the Cherry Fair and the association's plans.

The council also heard from Bob Kavanaugh, former director of the Union County Chamber of Commerce, and now working for Old West Federal Credit Union. Kavanaugh encouraged the councilors to consider moving the city's banking to Old West's branch in Union when it opens this spring, noting Union is closer to Cove than La Grande, where the city's banking is currently handled.

The council returned to the issue of the sidewalk ordinance near the end of the meeting when Little suggested having lawyers from the League of Oregon Cities review the ordinance, utilizing its offer of 10 hours of free legal advice to do so.

Councilor Alan Cadinha, who said he's "not very politically correct," spoke

up this time.

"Why are you making such a hard push on the sidewalk ordinance?" Cadinha asked Little, then saying there was a lot of "legal garbage" in the ordinance.

Brown, who is set to retire later this year, shot back at Cadinha and raised his voice to do so, stating the ordinance was needed to make sure new sidewalks were maintained and then questioned Cadinha just being worried about the city building a sidewalk in front of his property.

Little interjected and halted the conversation on the subject. He then said he would entertain a motion to consider passing a resolution for the free legal advice, which they are required to do if they want the advice.

No motion was made.

Instead, the council agreed to have a special session to rework the sidewalk ordinance and come to a consensus on wording.

The meeting is set for 6 p.m. Feb. 12 at Cove City Hall.

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ABDUCTION

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children's legal guardian.

At 3:51 p.m., La Grande law enforcement contacted Dean, who was staying at a motel in downtown La

Grande. She was immediately arrested and taken into custody without incident. The police found three children. Dean's daughters aged 4, 6 and 8, in the motel room. The children appeared to be in good health but had

"very few necessities with them," according to the news release. Dean has had legal guardianship of the third child for the past three years.

All three children were turned over to the child welfare division, and a safety

plan was made for them. The missing children's father and grandfather were immediately contacted. The release stated that the children's family members were relieved that they had been found and were safe.

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