

Baker County

No one injured when plane makes emergency crash landing

By **Samantha O'Conner**
EO Media Group

BAKER CITY — Tom Van Diepen and his passenger, Jason Dexter, took off from the Baker City Airport in Van Diepen's Cessna 170 single-engine plane Thursday afternoon intending on a short flight, just to warm the engine's oil prior to changing the fluid.

The friends' leisurely jaunt on a sunny day turned bumpy toward the end. Literally.

As they flew over the hills west of Baker City, Van Diepen, 71, noticed that the Cessna's engine was vibrating the entire aircraft.

Van Diepen, who has been a pilot since 1975, said his initial reaction was: "This is not a good sign."

Dexter's response was similar: "I said, Well, that ain't good."

Van Diepen didn't think he could make it back to the airport, which was several miles to the north, and he didn't want to risk trying to land on Highway 7.

There's a private airstrip in the area west of Stices Gulch, several miles to the south. But Van Diepen didn't know how much snow there might be on that landing strip so he settled on a field beside Highway 7 in Bowen Valley, a few miles south of Baker City.

"I just did a precautionary landing on the Jensens' hay field," Van Diepen said.

He was able to land about 5 to 10 minutes after noticing the engine vibration. Although the landing was uneventful and neither Van Diepen nor Dexter was hurt, the day's challenges weren't over.

While Van Diepen was taxiing the plane toward a road, he rolled into an irrigation ditch.

"We landed clear on the other side and I was just taxiing over to Juniper Lane to be closer to a house with a phone so I didn't have to walk so far," he said. "If I had just stopped right there, we would have been in a lot better shape."

The plane sustained damage that will take a number of months to repair at Baker Aircraft, Van Diepen said.

The incident wasn't his first unplanned landing during his 45 years as a pilot.

"I blew an engine once and then I had the same thing that happened now. It was running rough, so I landed in Burns but I just landed on the airport," he said.



Photo by **S. John Collins**/EO Media Group

Tom Van Diepen, fourth from left, works with Clint Morrison, right, Bowen Valley Rural Fire District volunteer, and a backhoe operator, Chase Giesbrecht, to raise a downed plane out of a field ditch in Bowen Valley Thursday. Three others shown, from left, are Sarah Rea, Dusty Brown and Jason Dexter. Dexter was alongside pilot Tom Van Diepen as a passenger during the ordeal.

Public Health



Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group

A Two Rivers Correctional Institution inmate Monday helps to install the basketball floor at the Pendleton Convention Center in preparation for the state 2A basketball tournament later this week.

OSAA: 2A tourney to go on as planned

By **Alex Castle**
EO Media Group

PENDLETON — As Umatilla County and the state of Oregon respond to confirmed cases of the coronavirus, the Oregon School Activities Association is moving forward as planned with the Class 2A State High School Basketball Championships, slated to take place at the Pendleton Convention Center March 5-7.

"At this point, we haven't had conversations about modifying or cancelling the event," said OSAA Executive Director Peter Weber. "If things change and we need to make accommodations, we'll be in contact with state health authorities and our schools and do so."

The Oregon Health Authority confirmed Monday morning that an adult Oregon resident from Umatilla County was the state's third presumptive positive case of COVID-19, which had been confirmed in more than 40 people across 12 total U.S. states and killed six people in the state of Washington as of Monday afternoon.

At this time, the state health authority isn't recommending the cancellation of the tournament, or any other public events in the area.

"While cancelling events or closing schools are tools that can help us control this, these aren't tools that OHA or local public health partners are using widely at this time," said Dean Sidelinger, an Oregon state health officer. "We are really assessing situation by situation, what is the risk in the particular setting and making those recommendations based on those risks."

This year's tournament will feature eight girls and eight boys teams representing 14 schools that will be traveling from the state's southern coasts and the Portland area out east, while Union High School's girls team is the region's sole representative and enters as the tournament's No. 2 seed.

For now, Union Superintendent Carter Wells said

the school is monitoring the situation in Umatilla County as it develops.

"We're going to know much more come Wednesday of what is going on over there. Right now, it's a little too early about how much that's going to be impacted other than we're going to have preventative measures in place for our kids going over the hill," he said. "We're going to make sure they are sanitizing hands, or maybe sanitizing the basketball after a shootaround."

Weber said the OSAA is also monitoring the situation and communicating with the state health authority on what precautions to take for this week's 2A tournament, along with the other five classifications that will come together at various sites around the state to compete over the next few weeks.

Many of those precautions include trying to deter those who may be contagious from attending, stocking up on sanitation supplies and conducting full venue cleanings before and during the events.

While school officials have reached out to the OSAA looking for more details and information on how its responding to the risks posed by the coronavirus and what precautions they should take, Weber said nobody has yet to express that they won't attend due to the concerns.

"Everybody is sort of in the same boat right now," he said. "I think everyone has a heightened concern, as do we."

Weber said weather has forced the OSAA to make accommodations and adjustments at its championship events in the past, but the spread of the H1N1 virus in 2009 was the only time he could remember dealing with a virus that was posing risks to its events.

Though the classifications have changed and evolved over the years, small schools in Oregon have been competing for state basketball championships in Pendleton without fail since 1964.

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