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Bonneville Power Administration adds power shutoffs to wildfire plan for Pacific Northwest

By JEDIDIAH MAYNES
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA — Energy officials could intentionally shut off power in some areas of the Pacific Northwest this summer to mitigate wildfire risks, regulators said, though it would likely be a rare event.

Bonneville Power Administration officials said in a release Wednesday, June 2, they've "added a public safety power shutoff procedure" as part of a wildfire mitigation plan "to protect public safety, life and property."

"This procedure is (a) preventative measure," BPA Administrator John Hairston said in the release. "BPA is committed to taking appropriate actions to prevent, mitigate and quickly recover from the devastation wildfires bring to the people and communities we serve."

Officials said a shutoff should be rare and requires the evaluation of several conditions, including weather and the status of the electrical system, to determine a high risk of wildfire ignition. BPA officials said they would

require very dry conditions, wind gusts above 60 mph and relative humidity below 20% before a shutoff is enacted.

"Taking a line out of service ... is a measure of last resort," said Michelle Cathcart, BPA vice president of Transmission Operations, in the release.

BPA officials said taking a line out of service does not necessarily mean residents and businesses will lose power, although warnings may come in "compressed" times because of how quickly wildfire conditions can change.

BPA administers and regulates electrical power generated by hydroelectric dams in the Pacific Northwest among other federal energy facilities. The energy is purchased by utility companies in the Northwest, such as Milton-Freewater's City Light & Power.

Rolling blackouts have been used in places such as California to help prevent wildfires.

Experts are predicting a bad wildfire season for much of the West as extreme drought conditions have not let up.

Report: Migrant communities distrust Oregon's drinking water

By DIANNE LUGO
Salem Statesman Journal

SALEM — A report from the Oregon Water Futures Project reveals widespread distrust in drinking water among communities of color and a sharp disconnect between communities and policymakers when it comes to water policy.

Oregon Water Futures Project staff began interviewing members of native, Latinx, Black and migrant communities across the state in 2020, attempting to understand their water resource priorities. Partnering with Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, Euvalcree, Unite Oregon, Verde, NAACP Eugene-Springfield and the Chinook Indian Nation, 104 people across eight counties were able to participate.

According to the report, climate change, aging infrastructure and a lack of investment in clean water has stressed the state's water systems, disproportionately risking the health, safety and economy of Oregon's rural and low-income communities of color.

"There are serious information gaps about water bills, water quality and emergency preparedness that must be addressed," said Alai Reyes-Santos during a media overview about the report.

Reyes-Santos is one of the lead authors of the report and a professor at the University of Oregon.

The University of Oregon is one of the institutions that comprises the Oregon Water Futures Project, which hopes to "elevate water priorities" and "impact how the future of water in Oregon is imagined." Others involved in the collaboration include the Coalition of Communities

of Color, Oregon Environmental Council and Willamette Partnership.

Those interviewed shared stories of inability to afford their water bills, buying bottled water because they don't trust their tap water, rationing bottles to afford the added expense and boiling their water first or using other culturally specific practices to purify water. Water filters, they said, did little to assuage their fears about bad water quality.

"The experience of severe water scarcity in Mexico and Guatemala shapes water perspectives today," said Dolores Martinez, community engagement director at Euvalcree, a nonprofit led by Latinos in Umatilla and Malheur counties that helped conduct 35 phone interviews.

The majority of the participants immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico and Guatemala and many of them did not have potable running water in their country of origin.

"They learned how to source and clean water before using it to drink and cook. Some people still use this practice at home in Oregon because of a lack of trust in drinking water sources," Martinez said.

Umatilla and Malheur counties were identified in a 2019 study among 16 counties in the Northwest with the highest rate of drinking water violations. Those violations were higher in low-income and communities of color.

Communities relying on well water are also increasingly concerned with poor regulation of domestic wells. Across different regions, participants thought there was not enough routine testing and they shared experiences with pollution of well water.

2% of state's COVID-19 cases found in the vaccinated

By AIMEE GREEN
The Oregonian

SALEM — Officials reported Thursday, June 3, that about 2% of the people diagnosed with COVID-19 in Oregon in May were completely vaccinated — meaning an overwhelming 98% of those sickened by the coronavirus either were unvaccinated or were only partially vaccinated.

A total of 398 Oregonians who'd received their full recommended courses of vaccines were infected with the virus from May 3 to May 31, the Oregon Health Authority announced in its monthly report. Officials identified them as "breakthrough cases." Twelve of them died, according to rough numbers provided by the state.

That compares to about 15,700 Oregonians who were unvaccinated or partially vaccinated when they were infected in May. Approximately 115 of them died, according to rough figures provided by the state.

Officials say about 91% of people who've died in Oregon from COVID-19 weren't vaccinated or



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

Robert Fox, a graduate student at Eastern Oregon University, prepares to receive his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at a vaccination clinic Tuesday, May 4, 2021.

were partially vaccinated. Although the vaccines aren't 100% effective even in fully vaccinated individuals, officials say they are highly successful at preventing infection and dramatically decreasing the chances of hospitalization or death.

In all, officials have identified 1,009 breakthrough cases and 20 deaths among these Oregonians since the state started tracking this data in February.

The average age of a person who was infected after completing the recommended doses of vaccine

was 51. The average age of those who died was 75, officials said.

But Oregon officials caution that some of the people counted as breakthrough cases were counted as such

even though enough time hadn't passed for the vaccines to reach their maximum effectiveness.

People aren't considered fully vaccinated until at least 14 days have passed since finishing their one-dose of Johnson & Johnson vaccine or two-dose courses of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. Yet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has defined a "breakthrough case" as someone who tests positive after 14 or more days have passed since receiving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine or receiving their second shots of Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.

That means a person could have been exposed and infected before the vaccines had time to provide maximum protection.

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2021 EASTERN OREGON PHOTO CONTEST

Official Rules:
Photo Contest open now and closes at 11:59 pm Sunday, June 20, 2021.
Staff will choose the top 10. The public can vote online for People's Choice from 12:01 am Monday, June 21 through 11:59 pm Thursday, June 30.
Digital or scanned photos only, uploaded to the online platform. No physical copies.
Only photographers from Oregon may participate.
The contest subject matter is wide open but we're looking for images that capture life in Eastern Oregon.

Entrants may crop, tone, adjust saturation and make minor enhancements, but may not add or remove objects within the frame, or doctor images such that the final product doesn't represent what's actually before the camera.

The winners will appear in the July 8th edition of Go Magazine; the top 25 will appear online.
Gift cards to a restaurant of your choice will be awarded for first, second and third place.

Submit all photos online at: lagrandeobserver.com/photocontest

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