

Mass crash in Umatilla County closes Interstate 84



Oregon Department of Transportation/Contributed Photo

PENDLETON — A mass crash involving dozens of vehicles early in the afternoon of Monday, Feb. 21, closed a portion of Interstate 84 about 21 miles east of Pendleton, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation and Nick Vora, Union County's emergency services director.

The crash was reported on ODOT's Trip Check website at 12:44 p.m. Pendleton Fire Chief Jim Critchley said the wrecks stretch for a mile and emergency agencies from regional counties are responding.

Capt. Merle Laci with the La Grande Fire Department said two ambulances and one rescue rig were on scene from Union County, with crews from Union and Island City fire departments on standby. The La Grande Fire Department sent eight personnel to the scene.

Laci said crews are conducting triage and no other emergency vehicles have been called as of 2:30 p.m.

According to a press release from ODOT, "This is expected to be an extended closure lasting through the evening for westbound freeway and at least several hours for eastbound freeway."

The westbound freeway also is closed to trucks in Ontario due to limited truck parking in Baker City and La Grande. Highway 204 (Tollgate Highway) and High-

way 245 also were closed to all but local traffic. ODOT reported these are not viable detour routes for freeway traffic.

Grande Ronde Hospital Incident Commander Elaine LaRochelle activated the hospital's incident command system, according to a press release from Mardi Ford, public information officer.

"We are preparing to support any patients sent our way with emergency services and medical care," Ford said in the release. "We do not have any news on distribution of patients to be sent our way. However, we are prepared to assist in this emergency. We are cooperating fully with all regional partners, including our media contacts, to do what we can to keep everyone informed. Our primary mission, however, is to provide emergency services and medical care to patients in need. Once we know more, we will issue an update."

Emily Smith, director of communications for St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton, reported that as of 3 p.m., the hospital received six patients from the multi-vehicle crash. "The patients' statuses are unknown at this time," she reported, "and no information on ages etc. is available to the media at this time."

The Observer will have updated information on this story in print Thursday, Feb. 24, and online as it becomes available at lagrandeobserver.com

SURVEY

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whiney third will find some way to draw attention to themselves and how they're being personally oppressed instead of doing any meaningful Democratic debates," wrote Brenda Pace, a Deschutes County resident who responded to the survey.

The survey asked about the state's direction and mental well-being. The margin of error ranges from 1.6% to 2.6% due to rounding. The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center is an independent, nonpartisan organization. The center partnered with Pamplin Media Group and EO Media Group, which owns The Observer and The Bulletin.

In the survey, suburban respondents were more optimistic than rural residents. Yet rural residents said they were less likely to believe the state is headed in the right direction than other Oregonians, according to the survey.

Roughly a quarter of the respondents defined themselves as from rural areas and 37% were suburban.

The younger the respondents were and the farther west of the Cascades they lived, the more optimistic the responses about 2022, according to the survey. Generally, those who were ages 45 to 74 were not optimistic about the year, according to the results. And Black, Indigenous and other people of color were significantly more likely to say they were hopeful about 2022.

"I have lived many years growing up in Portland and now live outside of Portland in a rural area," wrote Aurora Kay Sancoy, who lives in Lane County. "One thing I have learned is that politics differ geographically."

CTE

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"Transition time will be reduced and the time students have to work in the woodshop will be increased," Wells said.

The robotics lab will replace one now located in the high school gym. Wells said that having a robotics classroom in the CTE center will be a plus because the CTE center includes a metal shop, where there are many tools that are needed to create robots.

A timetable for the construction of the classroom, robotics lab and open-air

work station has not been set yet because it has not been determined how much construction costs will be. The Union School District is now accepting proposals and bids from contractors for the construction. Wells said that if the amounts the contractors would charge for the projects is more than what the school district can pay, some of the work will be postponed until funding is available.

"We will see what we can afford," Wells said. "I'm hopeful that we will receive an offer we cannot refuse."

The school district has made the construction of

the robotics lab and the classroom its top priority and the building of the outdoor work space its second priority.

Wells said it is very likely that construction of the classroom and robotics lab will begin in early March and could be finished by early fall.

Wells wants the Union School District's CTE program to develop to the point that students, after graduating, will have the skills needed to begin working in the manufacturing industry for local firms, such as Woodgrain Lumber, Boise Cascade, Northwood Manufacturing and Barreto

Manufacturing.

The planned additions come on the heels of a major boost the program received last summer when the school district's former bus barn was renovated into a woodshop with money from a \$140,000 state CTE grant. The grant was written by Karolyn Kelley, UHS's agricultural sciences teacher.

The renovation of the bus barn was completed in the summer of 2021 and provides much needed space for the high school's woodshop, which was revived in 2020 after being shut down for more than 25 years.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Union High School student Kyle Boren works in the school's woodshop on Monday, Jan. 31, 2022. The district's former bus barn was renovated into a new woodshop and welding building in 2021. Plans for further expansion in the career and technical education center include an adjacent classroom, a robotics lab and a large covered outdoor area.

STOPS

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such as a country road in rural Oregon on a winter's night — the loss of a headlight poses a serious safety concern.

"When we see a vehicle approaching us with two headlights — you're able to discern the outboard sections of that vehicle," he said. "If you see one headlight, in hours of darkness or low light, you know, is it a motorcycle or is it a vehicle with a headlight out, and which headlight is it? If it's a two-lane highway or a roadway, you don't know — are they in their lane or your lane? It's genuinely a safety issue."

Bell also said that in his many years working as a law enforcement officer, and among the countless times he's stopped motorists for faulty equipment, he often heard the driver state that they were unaware that their headlights were out. That can spell disaster, Bell said, if the other headlight fails as well, creating a situation that is "straight-up unsafe."

Oregon State Police has a program in place that gives motorists with faulty



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

An Oregon State Police trooper's signature hat sits in the cabin of an OSP service vehicle on Wednesday, Jan. 26, 2022. A law in the Oregon legislature would remove the ability of officers to stop motorists for faulty lights, which La Grande Police Chief Gary Bell sees as a safety concern.

lighting a voucher for auto parts stores to allow them to get discounts on the parts needed to fix issues such as burned-out bulbs.

But the law, if passed, would limit those interactions and prevent drivers and motorists from receiving those vouchers and the notification that their equipment was defective. OSP officials said they weren't looking to discontinue the program, however.

"At this time there are no plans to discontinue the Car Care Program," Oregon State Police Capt. Steph-

anie Bigman said. "The passage of SB1510 may affect the overall numbers of vouchers handed out but officers would still have the option of providing the vouchers if the person was stopped for an unrelated violation."

SB1510 would also make changes to the way in which law enforcement officers search vehicles. The bill would require motorists give informed verbal consent for the search when no probable cause is found. That verbal consent would also need to be recorded.

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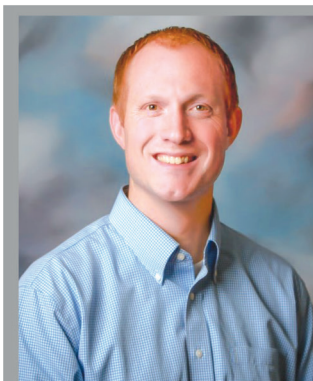
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