

Business / Agriculture

EPA says fire’s mercury at acceptable levels

BY KERRY McQUISTEN
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On Monday, August 28 in the afternoon, Dispatch received a report of a structure and grass fire up Griffin Gulch, just outside Baker City on the property of Charlie Cree.

The Greater Bowen Valley Rural Fire Protection District responded. The fire spread to other items around the home including an RV, according to the Baker County Sheriff’s Office. The Baker City Fire Department, Baker Rural Fire Department, ODF, and Baker County Emergency Management Fire Division also responded

Cree was transported to Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City with burns. It is suspected that the fire was caused by sparks from a grinder. During the fire an unknown volume of elemental mercury was released. Since such a release could pose a potential threat of mercury contamination, assessments were conducted of the area, firefighters, their vehicles and their equipment.



Photo courtesy of Karen Brinton.

A fire up Griffin Gulch last week is thought to have been started by a spark from a grinder.

Initial testing and investigation of equipment and fire stations indicated that mercury levels were within acceptable limits. Officials in Baker County worked closely with the Environmental Protection Agency and continued to work through last weekend in response to that mercury release. According to a press release, the EPA has completed the initial assessments and determined elevated levels of mercury

are isolated to the site of the release and some of the Personal Protective Equipment worn by responders. All assessments made of response vehicles, fire stations, and individual responder’s homes have found levels of mercury are within EPA acceptable levels. Mercury is naturally occurring in the environment, and some low level of mercury can be normal. EPA, state and local officials have worked with the

landowner to discuss the risks and extent of contamination, to isolate the site, and will continue to work with the landowner on opportunities for site clean up. Said the press release, “There is no threat to the public and Baker County appreciates the work and coordination of the responders, local, state and EPA officials to fully investigate this matter to protect the safety of our community.”

Fire Department grant

CONTINUED FROM
PAGE 1

Warner said Tuesday, “With the addition of three 40-hour people we can, I believe, significantly cut the overtime budget. The problem that we have is that it’s ongoing (the need for overtime) and the last two months we’ve used a lot of overtime.” Meaning a portion of that budget that could’ve been utilized is already gone. That poses the question: Could another fee be added to City Utility Bills to meet the financial need? Shortfalls in the City Budgets saw the passage of a Public Safety Fee in the amount of \$6 for business and \$3 for residential that went into effect in July. That fee was met with a large amount of community resistance but was passed by City Council nonetheless, and is still

a matter of contention among citizens. Although not dismissing the prospect altogether, Warner said, “I would rather doubt that, at least this year.” He went on to say, “We are working on different ways to enhance the ambulance revenue which is a big part of the cost of the fire department. But once again, those aren’t known things but they are things we’re going to try to do.” The ambulance billing was contracted out to a third party in the 2016-2017 budget year with a large increase in projected revenue that did not materialize. That failed venture was in part to blame for the 2017-2018 budget shortfalls. The City terminated the third-party contract in June and has since taken back control of the ambulance billing.

It is important to note that many of the ambulance runs are for Medicare and Medicaid recipients and funds collected for those services are set at specific amounts, less than what a usual ambulance service call is billed. As far as when the City is required to officially accept or decline the SAFER grant, Warner commented, “That is something we don’t know yet. I’m assuming we have a month or two. The only thing we have received is that we received the grant.” Warner said he and staff are working on different schedule models of how use of the grant dollars would look in the department before presenting it all to City Council. Council can then begin the task of figuring out options to “pay for it.” Warner was very clear saying, “If we enter into it we have to cover the

match, that’s the big decision that the City Council has. Once we make the decision to accept then we need to have the funding lined up for the three years.” Warner noted that finding the funds to retain those positions after the grant expires in three years would be difficult. He expected to have information for the City Council to review by the next Council meeting Tuesday, September 12, 2017. He said, “I will have some type of proposal for Tuesday night or at least some alternatives and then they may talk about it at the meeting or move it on to our next meeting later in September.” He added, “If we can do it basically with overtime (monies) it’s a pretty good deal—but that remains to be seen.”

Benefit held to buy seizure dog

BY SAMANTHA O’CONNER
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On Sunday, September 3, Baker City Events held a benefit concert at the Geiser-Pollman Park to raise funds to help local Natasha Harrington apply for a grant for a seizure dog. They were able to raise \$5,136. Harrington has had epilepsy since she was 12 years-old. Her first diagnosis was not correct and they did not find out the right diagnosis until last year in April.



Samantha O’Conner / The Baker County Press.

Natasha Harrington with her mother Robin Harrington.

SEE BENEFIT
PAGE 8

— WEEKLY HAY REPORT —

Friday, September 1, 2017 — Eastern Oregon
Prices trended generally steady. All prices reported today are 2017 crop, unless otherwise noted. Most producers are done with first and second cutting and out in the field working on third cutting. Fires and smoke throughout the state have slowed movement of hay due to highway closures and fire mitigation. Retail/Stable type hay remains the largest demanded hay. The export market demand has increased as compared to prior reports.

Tons	Price Range	Wtd Avg
Alfalfa Large Square Premium		
30	160.00-160.00	160.00
Alfalfa Large Square Fair		
150	112.00-112.00	112.00

USDA Market News Service—AMS.USDA.gov

— CATTLE MARKET REPORT —

Wednesday, August 30, 2017
Vale, Oregon
Cattle sold through the auction: 872

Steer Calves		
300-400#	Bulk N/A	Top N/A
400-500#	Bulk 143.00-169.50	Top 174.00
500-600#	Bulk 133.00-153.00	Top 153.50

Heifer Calves		
300-400#	Bulk 153.00-166.00	Top 177.00
400-500#	Bulk 129.00-149.00	Top 161.00
500-600#	Bulk 125.00-138.00	Top 141.50

Yearling Steers		
600-700#	Bulk 134.00-151.00	Top 151.50
700-800#	Bulk 129.00-142.75	Top 143.50
800-900#	Bulk 117.00-126.00	Top 128.00
900-1,000#	Bulk 109.00-116.00	Top 118.00

Yearling Heifers		
600-700#	Bulk 125.00-137.00	Top 140.00
700-800#	Bulk 121.00-130.00	Top 131.00
800-900#	Bulk 119.00-126.00	Top 126.75
900-1,000#	Bulk N/A	Top N/A

Thin Shelly Cows	47.00-65.00
Butcher Cows	66.00-73.00
Butcher Bulls	67.00-83.00
Stock Cows	N/A
Younger Heifers	77.00-97.00
Pairs Young -	N/A
ProducersLivestock.com	
541-473-3136	

— LOG PRICE REPORT —

Prices are based on the majority of saw mills in Northeastern Oregon and Central Idaho. The prices listed below are a composite prices of various sawmills willing to visit with me about this topic. Ponderosa Pine—small diameter class 8-11 inches diameter class \$250 per mbf. Only one sawmill was willing to buy small diameter pine at this time. Ponderosa Pine—medium diameter class 12-17 inches diameter class \$300 to \$350 per mbf Ponderosa Pine-large diameter class 18 plus inches diameter class \$380 to \$410 per mbf The Pine prices are still approximately \$40 per mbf below average lumber/log market due to 2017 fire salvage Doug Fir & Western Larch—\$380 to \$420 per mbf. Normal prices typically ranged between \$425 to \$475 per mbf. White Fir-\$300 per mbf. Normal prices typically ranged between \$340 to \$360 per mbf. Engelmann Spruce—\$350 at one Idaho sawmill, other sawmills including with White fir prices. In general, the log prices still impacted from 2015 fire season and fire salvage that resulted. Sawmills are starting to get log yard inventory in line with sawmill production needs. With a new Administration as of 1/20/2017, a more normal economic environment should result and hopefully a more healthy housing situation will result in a better climate for Northeast Oregon Sawmill and private forest landowners.

Courtesy of Arvid Andersen,
Andersen Forestry Consulting

— PRECIOUS METALS REPORT —

Price per ounce, USD
Gold: \$1,345.30
Silver: \$18.06
Platinum: \$1010.05
Palladium: \$947.29
Bloomberg.com

— AG COMMODITIES —

Corn: \$360.50/bu/USD
Wheat: \$445.75/bu/USD
Soybeans: \$973.75/bu/USD
Oats: \$234.00 bu/USD
Rough Rice: \$12.77/cwt/USD
Canola: \$497.50 CAD/mwt
Live Cattle: \$105.05/lb./USD
Feeder Cattle: \$143.57/lb./USD
Lean Hogs: \$63.43/lb./USD
Bloomberg.com