

Fire season starts early in Oregon

By Gary A. Warner
Oregon Capital Bureau

A statewide swath of lightning strikes is the "trigger event" that most worries state fire officials planning for what could be a second consecutive severe fire season.

Lightning strikes are "a typical event that we have on an annual basis that gives me most concern," said Doug Grafe, the Oregon Department of Forestry Fire Chief.

Grafe and other state fire, emergency, environmental and health officials held a press call Thursday to lay out strategies to try to keep 2021 from looking like 2020.

Firefighters plan for the worst and hope for the best.

Sometimes they get a nightmare like the Labor Day 2020 fires that burned over 1 million acres in Oregon, destroyed thousands of homes and left 11 dead.

Oregon is still digging out from those fires that broke out amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the Thursday press call, leading emergency, fire and health officials talked about improvements since last year: Better warning systems. An initial wave of 30 aircraft with better instrumentation to see flame through smoke. Pre-positioned fire crews and federal agency assets that are in Oregon because they never went home last year.

An air quality blog will give faster readings on where

air quality is becoming dangerous. In light of the 2020 fires, the state is adding more Spanish language materials to reach communities that may not be plugged into the existing fire warning systems.

An effort is being made to include more non-digital warnings for those who don't have cell phones or internet.

One of the positive aspects of the fires last year is that they are fresh in the minds of officials and residents. Evacuation plans can be used again and the devastation likely makes residents more likely to heed warnings.

Early signs show 2021 has the makings of another bad fire year. With a prolonged

drought in the western North America and hotter temperatures earlier in the year, the idea of a "fire season" has become outdated.

"It's a fire year," said Mariana Ruiz-Temple, the state fire marshal.

The cumulative effect is a much higher likelihood of mega-fires in numbers and sizes once thought unimaginable.

"These types of fires are not the types of fires we saw maybe 20 or 30 years ago," Ruiz-Temple said.

Oregon has already been hit with 300 fires this year, twice the average over the past decade.

More than 2,000 acres have burned, four times more than normal at this time of year. A wildfire on

Wednesday briefly closed Interstate 84 in the Columbia River Gorge.

Pinpointing when and where things could get bad is impossible. But peak conditions for fires this summer will migrate westward.

In June, the greatest danger will be in the eastern slopes of the Cascades. July will move the fire danger focus into the Klamath Basin. Last but far from least will be the thickly forested southwest around Medford.

"Really the bullseyes relative to drought conditions and that drives fire potential," Grafe said.

Last year's fires came down the river valleys of the western Cascades and toward suburban Portland, Salem, Eugene and

Roseburg. The rapidly growing area around Bend has been flagged in studies as a prime spot for a fire in forested areas that are increasingly populated.

But no two disasters are exactly alike. Grafe said the Labor Day 2020 fires were the result of an unprecedented collision of weather events: A cold front, severe winds from the east and drought conditions.

Grafe said that in the end it will be up to residents to prepare their homes with supplies of water, food and batteries. Masks used during the COVID-19 pandemic can help slow inhalation of particulates from smoke.

If the fires grow, residents need to look for alerts and evacuate as soon as told.

Next Door, Inc: 'GYM Gets You Moving'

By Janet Hamada
The Next Door

Gorge Youth Mentoring (GYM), a program of The Next Door, announces its summer-time virtual fundraiser: GYM Gets You Moving!

First, choose your adventure: Walk, run, bike, or some combination of all three. Register for the event, create your online profile, and choose how many miles you'll complete before Aug. 5. Adult registration is \$50, kids ages 5-17 are \$25.

Be sure to share the event with your friends and family and encourage them to join you.

Then, get moving and rack up your miles! Update your online profile with the miles you're completing.

Finally, celebrate your efforts and pick up your swag. Details to come on the Aug. 6 after party and pick up event.

This summer, get outdoors and move in a way that makes you happy while



Contributed graphic

raising vital funds for children and teens who need mentors.

If you're not interested in participating in GYM Gets You Moving but still want to make

a difference, sponsor a youth and their mentor for \$75 so they can join in the fun. To register, visit nextdoorinc.org. For more information, email events@nextdoorinc.org.



Join the GAC Fitness Family in June with **50% Off Enrollment, 10% Off Membership Dues** through 2021.



Offer for New Members for Fitness Only Memberships through June 20, 2021.

Gorge Athletic Clubs
Hood River | 541.386.3230
The Dalles | 541.298.8508
[email info@gorgeathleticclubs.com](mailto:emailinfo@gorgeathleticclubs.com)



STIHL

FIVE STAR DADS

FIND DAD A GIFT HE'LL LOVE



HSA 45 BATTERY HEDGE TRIMMER
\$129.99

Includes charger and built-in battery.

★★★★★

"Light weight and easy to use."

- Haefdh



FS 40 C-E TRIMMER
\$169.99

★★★★★

"This trimmer is a great value."

- Alwaysstihlin



BG 50 HANDHELD BLOWER
\$139.99

★★★★★

"Powerful and lightweight."

- Kevin2376



MS 170 CHAIN SAW
\$189.99

★★★★★

"It starts easily and runs great."

- Dick44

All prices are DSRP at participating dealers while supplies last. *The actual listed guide bar length may vary from the effective cutting length based on which powerhead it is installed on. Check out these reviews and others on the product pages at STIHLdealers.com. © 2021 STIHL



440 Riverside Dr., Hood River, OR
541 386 3603 • Sheppards.com