



Signs indicate a property has been searched for hazardous materials.



Steve Dopp gets a report from a member of the hazmat team about what they found at a residence.



A stream of metal melted from underneath a vehicle leaves behind a grim reminder of how hot the Camp Fire burned.



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

A deer moves through a destroyed neighborhood in Paradise.

Dopp: He has to seek out hazardous waste by going from house to house

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“Many of us here were involved with the North Bay fires that ran through Sonoma, Napa, Lake and Mendocino counties last year,” Calanog said. “What we are looking at here in the town of Paradise is likely to be twice as big, if not more than what we dealt with last year. It will take longer and cost more.”

The Camp Fire has since been put out and the town of Paradise completely evacuated. The only people left in the area are law enforcement, arborists removing dangerous trees, utility and aid workers, debris removal firms and construction crews.

Besides twisted metal, chimneys, melted trash cans and mailboxes scattered along the ground, the fire also left behind hazardous materials that now have to be cleaned up before people can return to the area or even think about rebuilding.

Dangerous materials

Enter Dopp and other contractors working with the EPA. Dozens of workers are now on the ground in Paradise looking through the wreckage to determine where dangerous materials exist and how to dispose of them.

Dopp, who lives in Astoria with his family and is the co-owner of Workers Tavern in Uniontown with his wife, Diana Kirk, was prohibited from talking publicly about his role due to contractual obligations between the EPA and the company he works for, Weston Solutions.

And while Dopp has worked in disaster zones before, in Paradise his job is especially tricky.

Before hazardous waste can be removed, it has to be found. The only way to do that is for teams to go house to house and sift through the wreckage. What they find



Plants begin to spring from the blackened ground near a destroyed home in Paradise.

has to be recorded and fed into a computer for analysis. So while hazmat specialists carefully pick their way through what is left on the ground, Dopp plugs information about what they are finding into a tablet computer.

Hazardous debris is everywhere, covered in a layer of delicate, white ash like freshly fallen snow. Propane canisters, cans of paint, firearms, ammunition, asbestos, gas tanks and other dangerous materials litter the blackened landscape.

Calanog said it will take months to begin cleaning up Paradise. The effort will cost millions of dollars and include several distinct types of work, beginning with teams like the one Dopp is working alongside.

“This is called phase one of the debris removal process,” Calanog said. “This is the first work in the aftermath of the fire. Our teams are doing an assessment of the properties and removing items like paint, solvents, cleaners, batteries and compressed gas cylinders. This first phase is done in advance of phase two, which is the larger debris removal.”

The information Dopp and other technicians are recording will be used to let county authorities know where the teams are, what properties have been cleared and what has been found,

Calanog said.

“What we are able to do is to start collecting data and report out at almost real time about the progress,” he said. “With this technology, we can report to the county and state down to each property what we have removed. We also have a lot of information from the county. So, we know the age of the home and that can be indicative at times of how much asbestos they are likely to encounter.”

What remains

EPA on-scene coordinator Bob Whittier said the initial assessment of the properties will provide important information to debris removal teams who will arrive in a few weeks.

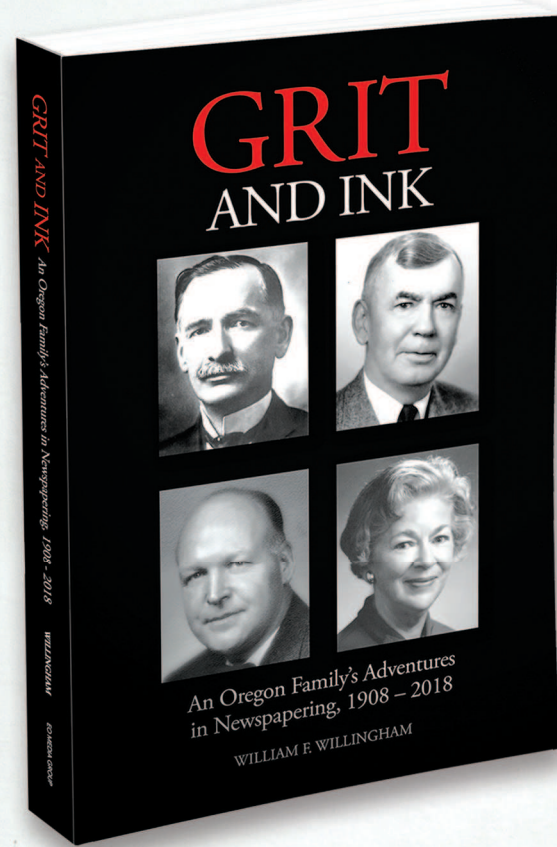
“There is also a health and safety aspect to the pre-screening,” Whittier said. “They are in there making sure there aren’t any inherent hazards before the suited guys can go in and remove materials.”

So while the fire may be out, there are still weeks of work left for people like Dopp, sifting through the ruins of thousands of structures.

As teams clear properties and evacuation orders are lifted, residents that survived the fire will begin to assess what remains. On most streets in Paradise, there is not much left.

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