

MEACHAM

Cause not yet found in March train derailment

No hazardous materials spilled following cleanup

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

Union Pacific Railroad is still looking into what caused a train hauling hazardous materials to derail March 2 in a remote and forested area of the Blue Mountains near Meacham.

A total of 10 cars jumped the tracks in a narrow, steep-sloped canyon where the tracks run on an embankment overlooking Meacham Creek. One of the tank cars

was carrying residual liquefied petroleum gas, and another was loaded with approximately 20,000 gallons of methylene diphenyl diisocyanate, or MDI, a compound in polyurethane used to make some glues and sealants.

No hazardous materials were leaked into the environment. Meacham Creek is a tributary of the Umatilla River, and provides habitat for a variety of fish species including bull trout and steelhead.

Michael Boykin, federal on-scene coordinator with the EPA in Seattle, arrived on scene a day after the derailment. He said the cleanup team returned off and on



Photo contributed by the E.P.A.
A Union Pacific train derailed early March 2 in a forested area along Meacham Creek.

over three weeks to finish disassembling and removing the cars.

"The site should be restored," Boykin said. "All the cars should be out. The metal is being salvaged."

The main contaminant, Boykin said, was the MDI. Since the material reacts with water to produce carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide, it could have posed a threat to native fish in the creek.

"We were very fortunate," Boykin said.

The site of the accident is about 2.5 miles northeast of Meacham, away from homes. The land surrounding the railroad's right-of-way is owned by Pendleton Ranchers, a ranching corporation. Crews did have to build

a temporary road into the site, Boykin said. Additional restoration activities included reseeding native grasses, planting red willow bushes along the creek bank and re-establishing the natural grade of the hillside above the road.

Union Pacific spokesman Francisco Castillo said he is checking back with the team into the cause of the derailment. Their investigation looks into all possible factors, including weather, the condition of the track and human error.

Contact **George Plaver** at gplaver@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4547.

BOARDMAN

Hiring, volunteer events at SAGE Center

East Oregonian

Job seekers can learn more about positions with ConAgra Foods at a hiring event Monday, April 20 at the SAGE Center in Boardman.

ConAgra Foods is hiring at both its Hermiston and Boardman Lamb Weston potato plants, as well as the Morrow Cold Storage and Watts Brothers Re-Pack facilities at the Port of Morrow. Positions include general laborers, sanitation, truck operators, mechanics and lab technicians.

The event will run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Attendees should come ready to interview, and must apply online at www.conagrafoodsca-reers.com.

The SAGE Center will also host the first Morrow County Volunteer Expo on May 6. Sponsored by Abengoa and Portland General Electric, the event will bring together a number of service groups for residents to learn about how they can help in their community.

"This is a chance for people to take advantage of finding out what's happening in Morrow County," said Sheryll Bates, event organizer and director of the Heppner Chamber of Commerce. "It's also a good opportunity for volunteers to see how these community groups work."

The expo is free and open to the public from 3:30-7 p.m. Dinner will be served, and children can watch a free showing of the movie "Despicable Me" in the SAGE Center theater beginning at 5.

Any groups interested in participating can contact the SAGE Center at 541-481-7243; the Heppner Chamber of Commerce at 541-676-5536; the Boardman Chamber of Commerce at 541-481-3014; or the Irrigon Chamber of Commerce at 541-922-3857. The deadline to register is Thursday, April 30.

PENDLETON

City mulls over funding options for infrastructure

Estimated that deferred maintenance, new fire station would cost up to \$18M

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

Mostly unsuccessful in bringing the community to city hall, Pendleton city officials will now go to the community to discuss the city's flagging infrastructure.

At a capital improvement advisory committee Thursday, City Manager Robb Corbett said the city will hold a series of listening sessions at schools throughout the city to garner input on how to fund repairs and improvements for the city's streets and facilities, as well as a new fire station.

The committee meeting also brought news that the Pendleton Fire Department and the Portland design firm Mackenzie analyzed three

sites for a new fire station — the station's current location at 911 S.W. Court Ave., the Baxter's Auto Parts parking lot at 336 S.W. Emigrant Ave., and the Elks Lodge at 14 S.E. Third St.

The analysis revealed the Baxter's parking lot would allow the best response times for emergency services, although Corbett said the city hasn't started negotiations for any of the sites and other locations could come under consideration.

While a previous bond proposal grouped a new fire station with repairs and improvements to other city facilities like city hall, the Vert Auditorium and the aquatic center, Councilman Al Plute suggested at least two separate bonds — one for the fire station and one for deferred

facility maintenance.

Though he acknowledged the need for a new fire station, he wasn't sure the public agreed and didn't want to jeopardize the money for badly needed repairs.

"I don't want to throw out the baby with the bath water," he said.

Public Works Director Bob Patterson estimated deferred maintenance and a new fire station would cost up to \$18 million over 20 years, while street repair and maintenance would cost an additional \$14 million.

Add in the \$8 million bond to help fund the city's Public Employee Retirement System that's already on the books and the final number far exceeds the \$32 million the state allows Pendleton to borrow through voter approved bonds.

Patterson suggested seeking out some sort of funding to cover street repair tempo-

"I don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water."

— **Al Plute**,
City councilor, on uniting fire hall and street repairs under same bond.

rarily. In the meantime, the city would hire a consultant to find a more permanent source of funding that would not only repair roads but maintain them.

Corbett said the committee would decide at its next meeting whether to put the bond proposal on the Nov. 3 ballot.

While time is of the essence, Councilwoman McKennon McDonald said a bond campaign for a new fire station would be harder without a permanent fire

chief in place.

One set of infrastructure needs that the committee decided was best left to the city council was the master plan detailing the future demands of the city's water, sewer and storm drainage systems.

Although the council is set to consider adopting the master plan at their next meeting, Patterson said the proposed utility rate increases and system development charges won't be voted on until later.

The city's series of community meetings will be at Lincoln Primary School on April 22, McKay Creek Elementary School on April 29 and Washington Elementary School on May 6. All meetings will be from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Contact **Antonio Sierra** at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

BRIEFLY

College fair set for April 16

HERMISTON — Representatives from Eastern Oregon's most popular colleges will be on hand to answer questions at the North Central Oregon College Fair Thursday, April 16 from 6-8 p.m. in the Hermiston High School commons, 600 S. First St. More than 30 institutions will be represented, including the military and trade schools.

All high school students in the region are invited to attend.

"The North Central Oregon College Fair is a convenient and fun way for families with high school students to learn more about what they need to do to prepare for college, college life and activities, as well as meet the representatives that have all of the latest information on scholarships and majors," Hermiston High School counselor Jacque Brandow.

Fire board asks for feedback

After failing to convince voters to pass a ballot measure combining Hermiston Fire & Emergency Services with Stanfield Fire District in November, the two districts want to hear why the measure failed.

Area residents can voice their concerns on a survey at www.hermistonfire.com or email fireboard@hermistonfire.com with feedback or questions.

It's too late for the districts to try again during the May election but the board hasn't ruled out a future campaign.

The two fire districts billed the merger as a way to save money, improve efficiency and provide better services including staffing the outlying stations at Westland Road and Punkin Center Road around the clock. Property taxes would have stayed the same in Hermiston, gone down in Stanfield and increased for residents outside the city limits but inside the district.

AA announces new hotline number

The local district of Alcoholics Anonymous has a new hotline number.

People calling the number may obtain information about AA meetings throughout District 3, including Hermiston, Pendleton, Mission, Arlington, Boardman, Condon, Heppner, Ione and Fossil. In addition, callers can be connected to members of the group.

The toll-free number is 800-410-5953.

Class of '65 plans 50-year reunion

HERMISTON — Organizers are planning a 50-year union for the Hermiston High School class of 1965.

The event is July 17-18 and begins with a memorial service Friday, July 17 at 5 p.m. at McKenzie Park for Gordon Spearman, a Vietnam veteran. Following the service is a no-host gathering at the Midway Tavern, which will include free hors d'oeuvres. A picnic

is planned Saturday, July 18 at 4 p.m. at Spillway Park, located near McNary Dam. It features catered food and beverages. A class photo will be taken at approximately 5 p.m.

The reunion fee is \$30. In addition, for an extra fee, people can participate in a round of golf Saturday, July 18 at Echo Hills Golf Course.

To register or for more information, including details about the April 14 planning meeting, call Connie at 541-564-0137.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to news@eastoregonian.com

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