

EAST OREGONIAN

TUESDAY, AUGUST 2, 2016

140th Year, No. 207

WINNER OF THE 2016 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar

WILDFIRE WEEKEND



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Spot fires smolder in the distance as traffic travels on Interstate 84 on Sunday near Deadman Pass east of Pendleton.

Cost of PERS to rise \$885M

PORTLAND (AP) — The cost of Oregon's public pension system will increase about \$885 million over the next two years, a higher increase than was previously expected.

The new costs are 10 percent higher than previously forecast and 44 percent above the \$2 billion per biennium that public employers are currently paying, *The Oregonian* reported.

The Public Employees Retirement System on Friday released an updated valuation of the pension fund's assets and liabilities that suggests the system's investment returns have lagged far behind the system's assumed rate of 7.5 percent. The fund currently has an unfunded liability of \$21.8 billion or about 71 cents in assets for every dollar of liabilities.

PERS resets public employers' required payments every two years to pay down any deficit and return the fund to a fully-funded status over a 20-year period.

At the meeting Friday, an actuary said that even if PERS investments reached their assumed returns of 7.5 percent, contribution rates will have to go up by about 4 percent of payroll in 2017, 2019 and 2021, putting contributions to the system at about \$4.5 billion in 2021 compared with \$2 billion in the current biennium.

John Thomas, a Eugene benefits consultant who chairs the PERS Board, said a spike in returns isn't going to solve

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Blazes erupt across Eastern Oregon

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

Wildfire season has flared up across eastern Oregon and Washington, with several large blazes over the weekend that forced some residents to temporarily flee their homes.

The Weigh Station Fire erupted Saturday afternoon along Interstate 84 east of Pendleton, burning in dried grass and timber on Emigrant Hill. Flames spread quickly over 500 acres, prompting evacuation notices for Deadman Pass and nearby Meacham.

A local Type 3 Interagency Management Team assumed command of the fire Sunday and set up camp on Poverty Flats. As of Monday, the fire was 35 percent contained and the cause remains under investigation.

Jamie Knight, spokesperson for the Oregon Department of Forestry, said 20 structures were threatened by the fire at Deadman Pass, but did not know how many of those are primary residences. Evacuations were ordered Saturday evening, and a Red Cross shelter was established at Sunridge Middle School. Residents were allowed to return home on Sunday, but a Level 2 evacuation notice is still in effect, meaning everyone should be ready to leave again at a moment's notice.

A Level 2 notice for Meacham



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A pair of helicopters perform bucket drops while fighting a wildfire Saturday near Emigrant Hill east of Pendleton.

was issued late Saturday and lifted Sunday as crews gained a better handle on the fire. The freeway was also reopened Sunday after being shut down for nearly 24 hours between Pendleton and Baker City due to smoke and firefighters on the road. Emigrant Springs State Park is expected to reopen Tuesday.

The National Weather Service has issued a red flag warning for the Lower Columbia Basin from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday, with winds blowing at 20-25 mph and gusts up to 35 mph. Knight said the team is aware of the forecast, and working

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Fire crews tackle several Washington wildfires
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HELIX

One man dead, one injured in farming accident

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

A 27-year-old man died Saturday in a farming accident near Helix after a water truck pinned him against a semitrailer.

Guy Simer, of Tygh Valley, and Jim Harris, 68, of Pendleton, were trying to tow the semi with the water truck, according to a report from the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office, after the semi became stuck on a hill on Vansycle Road.

The two men were hooking a tow strap between the vehicles when the water truck rolled backwards. The truck struck Harris and trapped Simer.

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said Thomas Sorey, who leases farm land there, saw the incident and called 9-1-1 at 8:55 a.m. Then he and another person moved the truck to free Simer.

Sheriff's deputy Jon Roberts was the first responder on the scene at 9:09 a.m., Rowan said, and performed CPR on Simer, who was unresponsive and had severe injuries. The Medic 400 ambulance out of Athena arrived moments later, Rowan said, and its crew took over CPR, but Simer died at the scene.

Harris recalled "just a lot of pain" in the moment the truck hit him.

"I didn't want to move, but I felt I had to," he said during a phone interview Monday from a hospital room at Sacred Heart Medical Center, Spokane.

He said he was foggy on some details and others he was cautious about answering on advice from an attorney while the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration conducts an investigation.

He said the first person he saw at the scene was Mark Moore, the administrator of the East Umatilla County

See ACCIDENT/10A

Man dies in Stanfield house fire

By **ALEXA LOUGEE**
East Oregonian

A house fire in Stanfield claimed a man's life Monday morning.

The man, who has yet to be identified by the fire marshal, died when his older model double-wide manufactured home was engulfed in the blaze. Neighbors reported seeing flames coming off the roof around 9:15 a.m. but no one could get inside to help him escape.

"I was just sitting inside, having coffee, the regular morning routine," said Thom Thongdy, who lives in the house adjacent to the victim's, when he saw the flames.

After calling 9-1-1 without reaching dispatch, Thongdy ran to the door to try and kick it open. He



Staff photo by Alexa Lougee

Firefighters work Monday morning to extinguish a house fire in Stanfield that claimed one victim.

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