

Truck crashes on I-84 climb after speed limit raised

By DICK MASON
The (La Grande) Observer

The wreckage in the aftermath of a semi truck accident Aug. 3 on Interstate 84 five miles west of La Grande caused jaws to drop. The truck's trailer was shredded, but the driver was fortunate enough to walk away unharmed.

Law enforcement may have been surprised by the driver's lack of injuries, but they were very familiar with where the crash occurred.

The semi truck, which was carrying recyclables, crashed violently at about 1:15 p.m. while traveling west through River Canyon, a curvy eight-mile stretch that runs from La Grande to a quarter-mile east of Hilgard State Park.

The crash left more than destruction in its wake. It also littered the ground adjacent to the road's shoulder with about 100 square feet of plastics and paper.

Oregon State Police Trooper Danny Rountt was not mystified by the cause of the crash after examining tire tread marks at the scene on the sweltering summer afternoon.

"The only explanation is that he was going too fast," Rountt said.

Unfortunately, wrecks like this one are becoming more common in River Canyon. Rountt said the



First responders examine a semi truck after it crashed on Interstate 84 five miles west of La Grande on Aug. 3. The driver of the semi truck was not injured.

Dick Mason/The Observer

number of accidents involving tractor-trailer units hauling commercial freight in River Canyon between March and October over the past two years is up 350 percent since 2015.

While the actual number of accidents is relatively small, "a 350 percent increase is staggering," Rountt said. "This type of a spike is alarming. It indicates a large problem for traffic safety."

Rountt traces the increase to 2015 legislation that boosted

the speed limit between The Dalles and the Idaho border on Interstate 84 beginning March 1, 2016. The speed limit for trucks jumped from 55 to 65 miles per hour, and the speed limit for passenger vehicles rose from 65 to 70 miles per hour.

Trucks traveling at higher speeds are vulnerable to crashing in River Canyon because their high center of gravity makes it difficult for them to negotiate the many tight curves in the eight-mile

stretch.

"Truck drivers are attempting to negotiate the curves while going too fast," Rountt said.

Truckers may believe they are safe while driving through River Canyon at 65 miles per hour because the speed is legal, but they are sadly mistaken, according to Rountt. He explained some types of truck-trailer combinations are at risk of crashing while traveling 65 miles per hour even when driving

conditions are perfect.

Rountt recalled an incident in which a truck driver believed to have been traveling 65 miles per hour crashed in River Canyon. Even though he had not exceeded the speed limit, the trucker was cited by the Oregon State Police on a charge of "violating the basic rule at or below the speed limit" because he could not control his particular vehicle combination around the tight curves, Rountt said.

Drivers coming around curves too fast for their tractor-trailer combination often are not aware of the danger in time to correct their vehicle before a rollover begins, said Robert Rountt, a senior Oregon State Police trooper (and brother of Danny Rountt). He said that he has seen videos showing when a truck goes around a curve too quickly and triggers a rollover, the process begins with the back trailer.

"The tractor flips over suddenly," Robert Rountt said, indicating that sometimes the driver is caught by surprise.

Law enforcement agencies have limited options beyond education for slowing truck traffic in River Canyon. Stepping up enforcement is not a viable option, Robert Rountt said.

He explained pulling over speeding drivers in the canyon is difficult because there are few places with

wide shoulders and many of the curves have guard rails.

"The availability of safe places to stop somebody is limited," Robert Rountt said.

He added that it is also difficult for police to park their vehicles in River Canyon at locations where they can serve as a deterrent for speeding drivers.

"It is not safe to park there," Robert Rountt said.

Another problem is that there are concrete medians in the middle of portions of the freeway. According to Rountt, if a state trooper spots a speeding vehicle going in the opposite direction he or she cannot quickly get to the other side of the freeway.

A number of the truck crashes in the River Canyon have shut down Interstate 84 for hours.

The guard rails, concrete medians and narrow shoulders mean trucks are more likely to land in the freeway, Robert Rountt said.

"The likelihood of a closure is greater because of greater constriction of the roadway," explained Robert Rountt, an accredited accident re-constructionist.

Because of the curves, other drivers can encounter a crash scene before they have time to react to it.

"One of our biggest concerns is a secondary collision," Danny Rountt said. "This is when risks skyrocket."

Oregon's non-unanimous jury law under scrutiny

Capital Bureau

Oregon's long-time law allowing felony convictions by non-unanimous juries could be tested if the U.S. Supreme Court accepts a case challenging a similar law in Louisiana.

Only in Oregon and Louisiana can a defendant be convicted of a felony with a 10-to-2 jury vote. All other states and the federal government require a unanimous verdict.

Lawyers for defendant Dale Lambert argue that the court should overturn its previous rulings that Louisiana's and Oregon's non-unanimous jury laws are constitutional.

The statutes deprive certain defendants of equal protection under the law and deny them the right to have accusations confirmed by a jury of 12 of their peers, according to Lambert's petition.

"This law essentially eviscerates the idea

that you are entitled to a jury of your peers when you are a black person who resides in Oregon, because statistically speaking, you are lucky if you get even one juror who is black, and that juror's voice may just not count at all," said Mat dos Santos, legal director of ACLU of Oregon.

Lambert was convicted of second-degree murder by a 10-to-2 guilty verdict in connection with the fatal shooting of a man in Louisiana's Orleans Parish on March 22, 2013.

His lawyers supported their petition to the Supreme Court with research by Professor Aliza Kaplan and law student Amy Saack of Portland's Lewis & Clark Law School.

Louisiana's majority verdict system was introduced in the 1898 Constitution as part of measures designed to "establish the supremacy of the white race," according to the researchers' February article in the Oregon Law Review.

State: Fire costs at \$21.9 million and rising

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

SALEM — As wildfire season continues across Oregon, the state's forestry department had spent \$21.9 million on firefighting costs as of Aug. 31, a department official said Tuesday.

With the Eagle Creek fire accelerating on the Columbia River Gorge, and other fires continuing across the state from Brookings to Sisters, firefighting costs are poised to grow higher.

Property owners with land classified as forest pay a state assessment to help cover firefighting costs in addition to money the Legis-

lature appropriates from the general fund. The state has also purchased an insurance policy most years since 1973 to help cover firefighting costs.

But before it can tap that coverage, the state has to spend \$50 million of its own money, according to Ken Armstrong, public affairs director at the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Although wildfire is a reality of summer for many of Oregon's rural communi-

ties, cities in the Willamette Valley also felt the effects of wildfire over the holiday weekend and on Tuesday in smoky air and ash.

The state's forestry department not only fights fires on state-owned land but also on federal and private land.

"Especially right now, the way things are this fire season, we pretty much have people on just about everything on the landscape," Armstrong said.

Corrections

The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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AccuWeather.com Forecast

TODAY **THURSDAY** **FRIDAY** **SATURDAY** **SUNDAY**

HOT

Dimmed sunshine; very hot, smoky | Hazy sunshine and smoky | Hazy sunshine; isolated storm | Smoky with hazy sunshine | Mostly sunny and pleasant

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST
96° 66° | 91° 65° | 87° 63° | 83° 59° | 81° 54°

HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST
98° 66° | 94° 68° | 90° 66° | 86° 60° | 84° 52°

ALMANAC

PENDLETON
through 3 p.m. yesterday
TEMPERATURE
HIGH 84° | LOW 56°
Yesterday 84° | 56°
Normals 82° | 52°
Records 99° (1932) | 36° (1892)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.00"
Normal month to date 0.07"
Year to date 11.37"
Last year to date 7.36"
Normal year to date 8.45"

HERMISTON
through 3 p.m. yesterday
TEMPERATURE
HIGH 85° | LOW 57°
Yesterday 85° | 57°
Normals 83° | 52°
Records 97° (2003) | 37° (1956)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.00"
Normal month to date 0.05"
Year to date 6.65"
Last year to date 5.04"
Normal year to date 6.17"

SUN AND MOON
Sunrise today 6:23 a.m.
Sunset tonight 7:24 p.m.
Moonrise today 7:54 p.m.
Moonset today 6:40 a.m.

Last New First Full
Sep 12 Sep 19 Sep 27 Oct 5

REGIONAL FORECAST

Coastal Oregon: Some fog in the morning; mostly cloudy today.
Eastern and Central Oregon: Dimmed sunshine, very hot and smoky today. Partly cloudy tonight.
Western Washington: Sun and clouds today. Fog at the coast in the morning; smoky elsewhere.
Eastern Washington: Hazy sun today; however, sunnier in the north; smoky elsewhere. Mainly clear tonight.
Cascades: Hazy sun and smoky today; not as warm in the south. Partly cloudy tonight.
Northern California: Mostly sunny today; a thunderstorm in spots in the interior mountains.

REGIONAL CITIES

	Today			Thu.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Astoria	72	57	c	69	56	c
Baker City	99	52	s	94	53	s
Bend	91	59	pc	82	55	t
Brookings	69	59	c	66	58	c
Burns	97	51	s	87	49	s
Enterprise	96	59	pc	92	61	s
Eugene	84	59	pc	78	56	t
Heppner	94	64	s	89	63	pc
Hermiston	98	66	pc	94	68	pc
John Day	99	59	s	88	57	s
Klamath Falls	84	52	pc	75	47	t
La Grande	96	54	s	90	57	s
Meacham	95	51	s	89	55	s
Medford	90	63	pc	78	61	t
Newport	68	56	c	65	54	c
North Bend	70	56	c	67	55	sh
Ontario	97	59	s	93	63	s
Pasco	97	60	pc	94	59	pc
Pendleton	96	66	s	91	65	pc
Portland	86	65	pc	79	62	pc
Redmond	93	54	pc	83	51	pc
Salem	86	62	pc	81	59	pc
Spokane	94	63	pc	95	62	pc
Ukiah	96	52	s	89	54	s
Vancouver	84	64	pc	80	61	pc
Walla Walla	96	68	pc	93	69	pc
Yakima	98	64	pc	96	61	pc

WORLD CITIES

	Today			Thu.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Beijing	88	61	s	90	64	s
Hong Kong	90	80	c	88	80	sh
Jerusalem	83	64	s	83	65	s
London	65	51	pc	66	56	pc
Mexico City	69	57	t	68	57	pc
Moscow	55	52	r	65	50	pc
Paris	68	55	c	66	55	pc
Rome	80	66	pc	80	63	t
Seoul	74	64	r	81	65	pc
Sydney	66	51	r	67	51	s
Tokyo	78	71	r	83	71	sh

WINDS

(in mph)	Today	Thursday
Boardman	N 3-6	SW 7-14
Pendleton	NW 6-12	WSW 7-14

UV INDEX TODAY

1 3 5 5 3 1

8 a.m. 10 a.m. Noon 2 p.m. 4 p.m. 6 p.m.
0-2, Low 3-5, Moderate 6-7, High; 8-10, Very High; 11+, Extreme
The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection.

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather, Inc.** ©2017

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

National Summary: Rain and storms will soak the Eastern Seaboard today with localized flooding possible. Spotty showers will cool the Great Lakes as storms dot the Southwest. Fall-like air will plunge into the Central states.

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 112° in Needles, Calif. **Low** 28° in West Yellowstone, Mont.

NATIONAL CITIES

	Today			Thur.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albuquerque	88	63	pc	86	62	s
Atlanta	73	55	t	76	56	s
Atlantic City	77	62	r	75	58	pc
Baltimore	71	55	r	74	52	pc
Billings	84	53	s	86	54	s
Birmingham	76	53	pc	76	55	s
Boise	98	67	s	94	68	s
Boston	76	65	r	76	59	r
Charleston, SC	85	65	t	81	62	pc
Charleston, WV	70	50	pc	69	51	s
Chicago	65	51	pc	68	54	pc
Cleveland	69	53	pc	67	53	sh
Dallas	86	62	s	86	64	s
Denver	82	53	s	86	57	s
Detroit	67	50	pc	65	50	sh
El Paso	90	67	s	92	67	s
Fairbanks	68	45	c	62	40	pc
Fargo	69	51	pc	80	48	s
Honolulu	88	75	pc	88	75	s
Houston	87	62	pc	85	62	s
Indianapolis	68	50	pc	71	53	pc
Jacksonville	85	68	t	85	69	t
Kansas City	71	49	s	76	58	s
Las Vegas	102	80	pc	101	77	s
Little Rock	78	55	s	78	56	s
Los Angeles	87	67	pc	84	66	pc
Louisville	71	53	pc	72	54	s
Memphis	76	55	s	77	58	s
Miami	92	80	t	92	80	t
Millwaukee	65	51	sh	66	54	pc
Minneapolis	65	51	pc	73	53	pc
Nashville	74	51	s	75	53	s
New Orleans	83	68	t	83	68	s
New York City	72	60	r	74	58	sh
Oklahoma City	78	55	s	82	61	s
Omaha	71	49	r	79	56	s
Philadelphia	74	60	r	74	57	pc
Phoenix	109	84	pc	106	83	s
Portland, ME	71	62	r	74	53	r
Providence	76	66	t	77	56	r
Raleigh	76	55	t	77	54	s
Rapid City	75	46	s	85	50	s
Reno	90	59	pc	82	57	s
Sacramento	88	63	pc	77	60	s
St. Louis	71	52	s	76	56	s
Salt Lake City	96	69	s	94	69	s
San Diego	80	69	pc	79	69	pc
San Francisco	78	65	pc	74	62	pc
Seattle	85	63	pc	78	61	pc
Tucson	102	74	pc	100	73	sh
Washington, DC	72	59	r	75	58	pc
Wichita	80	52	s	84	61	s

Weather (W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, i-ice.