

Officials: Salt helping to make roads safer

By **DICK MASON**
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — A mineral best known for adding zest to meals is being welcomed again this winter by motorists who have no taste for adventuresome driving.

The Oregon Department of Transportation has been using rock salt to reduce ice on interstates 84 and 82 in Northeast Oregon for the past three years. Statistics are not yet available to indicate if the salt is reducing crashes, but anecdotal information about the effectiveness of its use is promising.

“I don’t get as many calls at night as I used to about the interstate being closed because of serious crashes,” said Oregon Department of Transportation spokesman Tom Strandberg. “There is less ice and snowpack on the roads.”

Karl Farber, lieutenant at the Oregon State Police command in Pendleton, said he has noticed a difference since the transportation department began using salt.

“It just seems like it clears up the roads faster,” Farber said.

Ace Clark, manager of ODOT’s District 13, agrees roads clear up faster after storms now. That’s because salt prevents ice from forming under the snow. This means when crews push away snow with plows after a storm the road under it is often instantly clear of snow and ice.

Clark said ODOT snowplow operators “say it comes off like sheets.”

ODOT received permis-



EO Media Group Photo/Dick Mason

Sean Rohan, with the Oregon Department of Transportation, moves salt on Wednesday afternoon with a loader. The state road agency keeps the salt it distributes on Interstate 84 between Boardman and Ontario at a number of large sheds, including this one in La Grande.

sion to begin using rock salt in Northeast Oregon after a pilot project on two roadways in Southeast and Southern Oregon were successful: the 120-mile stretch of U.S. Highway 95 in the southeastern corner of Oregon between the Nevada and Idaho borders and an 11-mile section of Interstate 5 over Siskiyou Pass on the southern end of the state.

The number of crashes in the Interstate 5 test area dropped 27%, and the number on Highway 95 fell 23%, according to statistics the department published in the pamphlet “ODOT’s Use of Solid Salt.”

In addition to the positives salt offers, it is proving to be a dollar stretcher.

When the state granted permission to ODOT in 2017 to begin using rock salt to combat ice on Interstate 84 in Northeast Oregon, Clark said, it did not provide any extra money for purchasing it. To address this

dilemma, ODOT cut back on the amount of sanding gravel and magnesium chloride it purchases for ice reduction, freeing up funds to buy rock salt.

But Clark said ODOT hasn’t felt the cutback on the materials because the roads have not needed as much sanding rock and magnesium chloride since the start of salting.

Salting icy roads lowers the freezing point of the water that forms ice, which leads to melting and prevents falling snow or rain from freezing. The magnesium chloride ODOT long used also lowers the freezing level of water but not to the degree salt does.

The state road department uses 200 pounds of rock salt per mile, per lane for each application. ODOT advises drivers to wash their vehicles to prevent them sustaining the effects of salt, which is significantly more corrosive than magnesium chloride.

The agency also is selective in using rock salt. Clark said it is never applied when there is a foot or more of snow because then only large amounts of salt are effective in melting the snow.

An ideal circumstance for using rock salt is when there is 2 inches of new snow on the freeway in the afternoon just before temperatures are about to drop. Clark said in the past, such snow froze before it could be plowed off. Now, crews apply salt and then plow it off, keeping the road wet but not icy.

Clark said crews never apply salt on dry pavement before storms to prevent ice from forming because it won’t stay around.

“Wind or a truck passing over it would blow it away,” Clark said.

Magnesium chloride, in comparison, can be used on dry pavement before storms because it can not be blown off.

Clark said the use of salt is allowing ODOT to apply gravel more efficiently. He said in the past ODOT would put out sanding gravel, which soon would be scattered, forcing crews to put out a second load of gravel for the same ice. Now, because there is no ice due to salt use in some situations, crews don’t have to coat roads with the gravel at all.

ODOT’s Strandberg said sanding gravel also is labor intensive because ODOT has to pick it up later, in part for environmental reasons. Gravel gets covered in oils from being on the road and needs to be kept away from water.

City council could take action on Edwards Apartments

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton City Council could take action on two long-abandoned properties Tuesday night.

Acting as the Pendleton Development Commission, the council will consider demolishing or developing the Edwards Apartments, a dilapidated building at 602 S.E. Dorion Ave. that was condemned in 2010.

Charles Denight, associate director of the development commission, is presenting commissioners with three options: buy the building and demolish it, buy the building and restore it, or restore the building under a partnership with the current owner.

According to a report from Denight, the owner, Joe Bachmeier, is offering to sell the building for \$50,000. This is higher than the the \$37,900 Bachmeier bought the building for in 2018.

If the commission chooses to restore the building, Denight provides a \$650,000-\$900,000 estimate on top of the purchase costs, although a more accurate estimate would require a contractor to assess the building.

Bachmeier is also offering to retain ownership of the building while the commission covers the restoration costs.

“As the investment partner, the PDC would share in the rental return on the property,” Denight wrote in his report. “In

IF YOU GO

What: Pendleton City Council meeting
When: 6 p.m. start for Pendleton Development Commission; 7 p.m. city council
Where: 500 S.W. Dorion Ave.

essence, it would operate like a combination of grant and loan, where the PDC might ultimately be bought out of the partnership by the current owner. The PDC’s ultimate cost would depend on the result of negotiation with the owner on the amount and length of the shared revenue period.”

While councilors have long complained that the Edwards Apartments building is an eyesore, Denight said there’s merit to trying to restore it.

Denight wrote that the building was originally built in 1909 as a boarding house and is one of the few remaining examples of the few historic commercial buildings of its kind left in Pendleton.

Once the commission meeting ends, members will meet as the city council and discuss providing a five-year tax rebate to developer Justin Pratt of Richland, Washington.

Pratt wants to turn the old U.S. Forest Service offices at 2601 S.W. Hailley Ave. into a 33-unit apartment complex. The city estimates it would forgo \$15,766 in property tax revenue over the five-year period.

Schools see savings in energy management program

By **BEN LONERGAN**
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Students in the Umatilla School District energy management team will soon have a decision to make, according to District Superintendent Heidi Sipe.

Through the Umatilla School District’s participation in Energy Trust of Oregon’s Strategic Energy Management Program, the district has saved more than \$16,000 through changes to energy policies throughout the district, policies that were largely shaped by student action. Due to the students’ involvement in the cost savings, they will get a say in how the money is spent, said Sipe.

“The kids take their work seriously,” she said. “They’ve been treated as adults with the same level of voice and same level of buy-in.”

The students in the Umatilla district helped to drive behavioral changes, such as turning off lights and opening blinds for lights rather than using overhead lighting. In addition to behavioral changes, the district invested in technology, such as smart power strips that turn off unused computers and attached devices.

Energy Trust of Oregon’s SEM Program has been in operation in Eastern Oregon for roughly two years and helps businesses to more efficiently manage their energy usage to cut costs and reduce their carbon foot-

print. Through the program, the Energy Trust provides “energy coaches” and monitoring tools to allow businesses to better track and analyze their energy usage.

Romana Cohen is one of the program’s “energy coaches” and an employee of Stillwater Energy, a Portland-based consulting firm that specializes in strategic energy management. Cohen said that the program provides businesses with the tools they need to help curb their energy use and implement policies that sustain energy savings.

“We help in writing an energy policy and making sure there are specific points of improvement,” she said. “We’re offering an easy plug-in program that ultimately drives cost savings.”

Cohen stressed that consultants and Energy Trust employees work together to form the energy coaching teams, allowing people with different backgrounds to help offer a variety of solutions to energy management.

“We see the community evolving because of the impact on members,” she said. “It’s a combination of people, and energy and buildings.”

The program operates on a revolving yearlong basis and businesses can choose to repeat the program in an

effort to drive additional cost savings through the development of more stringent guidelines. Cohen said the goal of the program is to create a level of energy management that is sustainable from year to year, and energy coaches and organizers trade off to allow for new ideas.

Blue Mountain Community College was able to save more than \$30,000 in energy costs during their first year in the program, a change that freed up money in the operations budget for the purchase of a new tractor.

According to Dwayne Williams, the director of facilities and grounds at the college, the school is looking to see similar, if not more extensive, savings in their second year in the program.

“It’s been a really good experience, they’re a great resource,” he said.

Williams said that the primary savings have come from adjustment to heating and ventilation controls, as well as behavioral changes among staff to decrease electric use. In October, the community college ran a competition to see which facilities could decrease their energy use the most, something Williams said inspired a lot of people to think differently about how they use energy.

“They all put in a really concerted effort and we had great support from the administration,” he said. “I really think these changes will be sustainable.”

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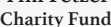
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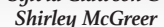
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1917 (R)

1:30p* 4:10p 6:50p 9:30p

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