

Local & State

Salt helped ODOT deal with snow, ice, but dense fog leads to 9-vehicle crash

By Jayson Jacoby
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Snowplow drivers were able to keep Interstate 84 generally clear during a snowstorm Monday morning in the Blue Mountains, in part by spreading salt on the road. But crews can't melt fog. Dense fog on a common phenomenon on the Cabbage Hill grade near Pendleton, was the culprit in a crash that involved nine vehicles and led to the westbound lanes of the freeway being closed for most of the day.

The chain reaction incident, which happened about 10:39 a.m., involved three commercial trucks and six passenger vehicles, said Oregon State Police Capt. Timothy R. Fox.

Travelers reported that one vehicle might have stalled, causing traffic to stop and leading to the series of collisions, Fox said.

"At this time investigators have not been able to identify the reported disabled vehicle," Fox wrote in an email to the Herald on Tuesday.

Two people were taken to the hospital in Pendleton with serious injuries, and five cars and one truck had to be towed, Fox said.

The crash affected only the westbound lanes. Those lanes were initially closed between Milepost 216 near Pendleton and La Grande, but the closure was later extended first to Baker City and then to Ontario as most parking spaces for trucks were taken in La Grande and Baker City, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

Crews were starting to reopen the westbound lanes



Oregon State Police photo

A chain reaction crash involving three commercial trucks and six passenger vehicles closed the westbound lanes of Interstate 84 for several hours Monday.

Monday afternoon around 3 o'clock, and allowing stranded vehicles to start moving past the crash site, when they learned that a second crash, involving at least two trucks, had happened about two miles to the east, said Tom Strandberg, an ODOT spokesman in La Grande.

Visibility was so poor — estimated at 50 to 75 feet at times — that emergency crews weren't immediately aware of the second crash, Strandberg said.

That second crash kept the westbound lanes closed for a few more hours, he said.

ODOT was able to keep the eastbound lanes open throughout Monday, despite snow falling much of the day.

Crews spread salt on the freeway from accumulating and that tactic, which ODOT started using last winter on the freeway between Boardman and the Idaho border, was successful, Strandberg

said. "I was told the road wasn't slick (at the time of the chain reaction crash)," he said. "Ice was not a factor as far as what I've been told."

Strandberg said ODOT drivers continued to use salt until later Monday, when temperatures plummeted into the teens, making the salt less effective.

Fog, by contrast, is a hazard for which there is no effective control, and it often forms on Cabbage Hill, the 6-percent grade that stretches for several miles.

Fog also blanketed the eastbound lanes at the time of the crash Monday morning, but Strandberg pointed out that the threat tends to be less for eastbound traffic because it is climbing the hill and tends to travel at lower speeds than the descending westbound drivers.

ODOT uses electronic message signs to warn drivers of dense fog, but the severely

reduced visibility is an inherently dangerous situation.

In his book "Traffic," author Tom Vanderbilt writes that although drivers tend to slow when they're in dense fog, research has shown that fog, among other effects, makes objects, including cars, seem to be moving more slowly than they actually are.

Vanderbilt also points out that a tactic some drivers employ in dense fog — staying close enough to the vehicle ahead so as to be able to see its red taillights — might seem wise since that could allow the driver to react immediately if the car ahead brakes.

The problem with that approach, Vanderbilt writes, is that the fog likely means that following a car close enough to see its taillights quite likely is too close for the following driver to be able to stop even if he reacts quickly.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Witham promoted to Marine sergeant

Elijah Thomas Witham, a Baker City native, was promoted on Feb. 1 to sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps. Witham, 22, is an armory advisor for Naval Construction Group One at Port Hueneme, California.



Witham

Witham is the son of Russell and Christina Witham, and a 2015 graduate of Baker High School. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 2015 and completed basic training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego and military combat training at Camp Pendleton, California.

He attended armorer school at Fort Lee, Virginia, where he set the time record for disassembling and reassembling the 1911 pistol and graduated at the top of his class to receive the Honor Graduate Award.

Witham served for two years as armorer with the 7th Communication BN Unit at Camp Hansen on Okinawa, where he was promoted to corporal.

He was assigned to his duty station at Port Hueneme in the fall of 2018.

Bunco night fundraiser for MOPS

A Valentine-themed Bunco night for women that's also a fundraiser for a local mothers' group is set for Feb. 7 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Baker City Nazarene Church, 1250 Hughes Lane.

Cost is \$5. Snacks will be provided. Proceeds benefit the local MOPS group — Mothers of Preschoolers.

Rabies vaccination clinic Feb. 13

Baker County veterinarians will have a rabies vaccination clinic for dogs and cats on Wednesday, Feb. 13 from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the OSU Extension Office, 2600 East St. Cost is \$10 per animal. Dogs must be leashed, and cats in a cage.

Baker City dog licenses will also be available. More information is available by calling the Animal Clinic of Baker, 541-523-3611, or the Baker Veterinary Hospital, 541-523-7772.

County planners to hear cell tower plan

The Baker County Planning Commission will have a public hearing Feb. 12 to consider a request for a conditional-use permit to build a cellphone tower on private land near Unity.

The applicant is New Cingular Wireless. The company wants to build a 199-foot tower on land owned by Bill and Nancy Moore. The tower will fill a gap in cellular service coverage for AT&T customers in the Unity area, according to the Baker City-County Planning Department.

The public hearing will start at 5 p.m. at the Courthouse, 1995 Third St.

Copies of the application and other documents are available by email for no cost. More information is available by calling Eva Henes at 541-523-8219, by email at ehenes@bakercity.org or by visiting the Planning Department in the basement of the Courthouse.

Social media classes set for businesses

Two seminars focusing on helping businesses use social media and digital media are set for Feb. 13 and 20 at the Blue Mountain Community College Baker City campus, 3275 Baker St.

The courses through the Small Business Development Center will be led by Michael Mettler, founder and director of possibilities at MCM Strategic + Communications at Walla Walla, Washington.

- Feb. 13, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. — "Next Level Digital Advertising: Cost Effective Marketing Strategies In Rural Markets"
- Feb. 20, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. — "Content is King: Building a Two-Way Conversation Online"

Each seminar costs \$59, payable to the Small Business Development Center. More information is available by calling Andrea Fowler at 541-278-5833 or at the Small Business Development Center's Facebook page.

Legislature ponders daylight saving time

By Gary A. Warner
WesCom News Service

SALEM — An update on an ailing state official and a bundle of bills that would change the state constitution — or what time Oregonians will have on their clocks — are among some of the highlights of news in and around the Capitol this week.

Time wars

Three weeks before the Legislature would have Oregon opt out of the twice-a-year switch between standard time and daylight saving time. The only difference is whether to drop "spring forward" or "fall behind."

Under daylight saving time, clocks are adjusted forward one hour in the spring. Standard time requires clocks to be moved back an hour in the autumn.

Senate Bill 320 and House Bill 2297 would abolish the annual one-hour change in time from standard to daylight saving time and "maintains Oregon on daylight saving time."

Senate Bill 464 by Sen. Brian Boquist also wants to stop the clock switcheroo, but would "abolish daylight savings time" and have the state remain on standard time year around.

Trying to stay on daylight saving time year-round is the trend on the West Coast.

Californians voted last November to stay on daylight saving time, a move that still needs to be approved by the California Legislature and Congress. Washington state lawmakers are considering a similar move during their current legislative season.

On the other hand, Arizona and

Hawaii don't follow daylight saving time (though the Navajo Nation, which includes large parts of northeastern Arizona, does).

Whatever the legislative outcome, it will have no effect this year. Daylight saving time begins at 2 a.m. Sunday, March 10.

Richardson resting more

Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson announced Monday that he will be cutting back on time he spends in his office in order to rest in his ongoing battle with brain cancer. Richardson, the only Republican among statewide elected officials, was diagnosed with cancer in May. His recent public appearances have been rare, though he did attend the swearing-in of Bureau of Labor and Industries Commissioner Val Hoyle on Jan. 7.

COUNCIL

Continued from Page 1A

Another topic during the meeting was emergency services and how the city pays for them. The city doesn't collect all of the money it bills for ambulance services,

but state legislation passed in 2016 is expected to increase the amount the city receives from Medicaid.

The Fire Department is looking for ways to keep the three firefighters it hired last year with a three-year federal grant. Fire Chief

John Clark said he plans to meet with county officials to discuss possible solutions.

Councilors discussed other potential revenue sources, including a tax on vacant businesses on Main Street, an idea Councilor Ken Gross mentioned last

month.

Another potential option is a gas tax that would raise money for maintaining streets.

The City Council has broached that topic in the past but never taken any action on the idea.

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SUN: (3:45) 6:45 MON-THURS: 6:45

THE KID WHO WOULD BE KING PG
FRI & SAT: (4:00) 7:00, 9:35
SUN: (4:00) 7:00 MON-THURS: 7:00

SERENITY R
FRI & SAT: (4:05) 7:05, 9:40
SUN: (4:05) 7:05 MON-TH: 7:05

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