

Local & Region



The Cornet-Windy Ridge fire burns south of Baker City in August 2015.

Submitted photo

Doctors worry about effects of wildfire smoke exposure

By Christina Morales
The Oregonian

While there hasn't been a lot of research into long-term health problems that can be caused by intermittent exposure to wildfire smoke, Oregon doctors say it should be treated as a seriously.

Dr. Paul Lewis, a Multnomah County Health officer, said it's challenging to pick apart the effects of intermittent exposure to wildfire smoke due to other air pollutants, but it doesn't mean it's controversial.

"It looks bad, it tastes bad, it smells bad — it's probably bad," Lewis said.

Although there aren't any wildfires flaring up in Oregon right now, experts predict the upcoming season could have higher risks of big and costly fires. Last year's wildfire season had heavy bills at \$514.6 million.

Lewis said smoke is made of small particles, some

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smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter. These particles act like air and go to the bottom of the lungs, where the body can't block them. The effects of ingesting the chemicals from these particles are still unknown.

Lewis said there are also concerns about the long-term effects with a mixture of a city's air pollution and the wildfire smoke and concerns about the effects from breathing in invisible chemicals from burning materials.

Health experts worry about the bad air quality that comes from breathing in wildfire smoke and how that can aggravate already existing heart and lung conditions.

People with lung problems

brought on by things such as cystic fibrosis, smoking, asthma, lung disease and small lungs could have a reaction to the wildfire smoke brought on by the air quality. When the body tries to get these smoke particles out, it can plug lungs, Lewis said.

"That's the kind of thing that could tip you," Lewis said. "People with lung disease already have bad days with wildfires or not. With bad air quality, it's added insult to their existing problem."

With heart disease, the effects from smoke can be more subtle, Lewis said. Coronary heart disease is the most common heart ailment and occurs when arteries are too narrow to give the body the oxygen and the blood supply it needs. Bad external air quality can worsen the condition.

Lewis recommends people with heart or lung problems get in touch with their health care provider before it gets

smoky, so people have medications and a plan in case symptoms flare up.

"That's why air pollution is such a big deal because it's everywhere, and you have to breathe," Lewis said.

Some evidence shows that smoke exposure in pregnant women may make it more likely that their babies could be born with a lower birth weight, said Dr. Richard Leman, a public health physician at Oregon Health Authority.

"If you can avoid being exposed to this stuff, the better," Leman said.

To prepare for wildfire season, Leman recommends having a room with clean air and a HEPA air filter in homes.

Frying things on a stove or burning candles can make the air quality in homes worse, so Lewis recommends steering away from that when trying to preserve clean air.

OREGON BRIEFING

Man sues Portland Police, claiming his hate crime report was disregarded

PORTLAND (AP) — A man is suing the Portland Police Bureau after he said officers disregarded his report on a possible hate crime.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reports Chuck Crockett, who is black, said he reported the crime to the North Portland Precinct March 15.

He says the tepid response from police officers made him feel like his trauma did not matter.

According to Crockett he was driving in Northeast Portland March 13 when he encountered a car driving well below the speed limit, so he honked. He says as he went around the car it tried to hit him and then followed him. Crockett says when he eventually pulled over a white man got out and yelled at him using racial slurs.

Crockett says when he went to report, white officers would not help him.

Brown signs bill requiring domestic abusers to give up guns on court order

SALEM (AP) — Oregon will close a loophole in state law that allowed domestic abusers to illegally hold on to their firearms.

Gov. Kate Brown signed a measure Tuesday that threatens further penalties to domestic abusers who refuse to turn over their firearms following a court order. It strengthens a 2015 law meant to keep guns from those with convictions for domestic violence or stalking. Legislators had heard complaints that abusers were still holding onto their weapons by skipping court hearings.

Democrats were only able to push through modest gun law changes this year despite a supermajority in the Legislature. A more sweeping gun reform package was cast aside as part of a deal to convince Senate Republicans to return from a walkout over education funding.

Brown and other high ranking Democrats say they plan to work on more expansive gun control measures in the future.

NEWSPAPERS

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EO Media Group has been publishing newspapers since 1905. The company recently bought two other Western Communications newspapers, the Baker City Herald and The Observer in La Grande, out of bankruptcy.

"There are a lot of reasons this makes sense for our company," Wright said of acquiring The Bulletin.

EO Media Group's offer includes the Bend printing press at 1777 SW Chandler Ave. The press would be removed from the building within 90 days, according to a proposed lease agreement filed with the court. Wright said she doesn't know yet where the press would move.

Rhode Island Suburban Newspapers has also acquired a former Western Communications publication, the Union Democrat in Sonora, California, out of bankruptcy. RISN offered \$1.15 million for the newspaper and its downtown office building.

EO Media Group would deliver offers of employment to identified employees no later than five business days before the deal closes, according to an asset purchase agreement filed in court. The closing date will be no later than five days after the court enters an order of sale.

Western Republicans look to recall to restore power

By James Anderson
Associated Press

DENVER — Republicans frustrated by losing their grip on political power in some Western states have begun deploying a new weapon: the recall.

Once reserved for targeting corrupt or inept elected officials, the recall has become part of the toolkit for Republicans seeking a do-over of election results. One GOP strategist in Colorado has put a name to it — "recall season."

To be sure, Democrats also have used recalls, most notably in Wisconsin, where they tried unsuccessfully to oust then-Republican Gov. Scott Walker in 2012 over his actions to weaken public-sector unions.

But Republicans have been mounting recall efforts against Democratic state lawmakers and governors at an unprecedented rate over the past two years in a handful of Western states, at the same time their political fortunes in those states have been declining.

In 2018, they recalled a freshman state senator in California as a way to temporarily undo a Democratic supermajority.

The same year in Nevada, two Democratic lawmakers and an allied independent fended off recall attempts.

In Oregon, Republicans are pursuing a recall of Democratic Gov. Kate Brown, who was reelected last year, after GOP lawmakers walked out of the Senate to try to block votes on climate change and education bills.

Colorado, where Democrats control both houses of the legislature and the governor's office, is seeing its highest level of recall activity since 2013, when two Democratic

lawmakers lost their seats for supporting gun control legislation and a third facing recall resigned.

Recall campaigns are targeting Democratic Gov. Jared Polis, two Democratic state House members and two Democrats in the state Senate. Recall committees have been formed for other lawmakers, and the GOP's top-ranking officials have encouraged the efforts.

U.S. Rep. Ken Buck, newly elected as chairman of the Colorado Republican Party, told supporters earlier this year, "We need to teach them how to spell R-E-C-A-L-L."

Colorado recall proponents accused their targets of overreach on issues of gun control, climate change, taxes, sex education and the electoral college — issues that many of the Democrats ran on during their successful campaigns.

Karen Kateline, a talk show host working on the Polis effort, insists she and other Republicans aren't abusing the original misconduct intent for recalls.

"Nobody is putting the brakes on these people," she said of Democrats.

"It's our constitutional right to recall," said Nancy Palozzi, a Republican from the Denver suburb of Lakewood, who is leading an effort against state Sen. Brittany Pettersen. "We can't wait for new (GOP) candidates to be vetted for the next election. Three more years for the governor? And three more years for Brittany? No."

Democrats see the recalls as a blatant attempt to undo the results of the most recent elections, which produced a Democratic wave in several Western states.

Matt Harringer, spokesman for the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee, has a simple

label for the Republicans pursuing the recall attempts — "sore losers." The committee, which gets involved in state legislative races, has dedicated \$135,000 to help fight the Colorado recall attempts.

"Republicans are definitely on the decline in the West, and Colorado is the leader of that," Harringer said. "We don't think there's a huge appetite to recall legislators who are doing what they said they would do."

Nevertheless, Republicans see it as a worthy strategy. The Colorado Republican Party started months ago offering training sessions for what GOP consultant Ben Engen calls "recall season."

Proponents can use the process to time an election and shape the electorate on their own terms, when most voters aren't paying attention, said Engen, a Denver-based consultant who conducted some of those sessions.

For example, a petition drive can be timed to produce a special recall election during the winter holidays — taking advantage of lower turnout by unaffiliated voters who have helped turn Colorado, once a swing state, into Democratic-leaning territory, Engen said.

"There's a drop-off in turnout from presidential to midterm elections, and the same thing between midterms and off-year elections," Engen said. "Initiators of a recall can use the timing to maximize that enthusiasm gap."

To Democrats, that's essentially an admission that Republicans are using the recall not as a vehicle to oust corrupt officials, but rather as an attempt to game the system and flip seats they otherwise could not win in a regular election.

"The strategists see that a recall

may be the best chance of winnowing down the electorate in such a way as to sneak through a seat," agreed Jason Bane, a Denver-based Democratic operative. "They need something that goes under the radar for it to work."

In 2018, California Democratic Sen. Josh Newman lost his seat in a recall election, ending Democrats' supermajority. Recall proponents' stated reason for the recall was Newman's support for a gas tax increase, although he was one of dozens of lawmakers in both legislative houses to vote for it. Ironically, California voters reaffirmed the gas tax increase, which is now in effect, just months after voters recalled Newman in a lower-turnout primary.

"What made me a target of the recall wasn't my vote per se, but was the opportunity to instead redo an election just months earlier, and on more favorable terms," said Newman, who plans to run for his old seat in 2020, when turnout will be far higher.

Previous success, as in California and Colorado, has emboldened Republicans to keep trying.

In Nevada, a group of conservatives say they're preparing a recall effort against first-term Democratic Gov. Steve Sisolak, who signed a law, passed by the Democratic-controlled Legislature, adding restrictions to the recall process.

Oregon Republican Party Chairman Bill Currier filed paperwork to recall Brown based on what he called the governor's failure to honor the will of the voters and her "politically-motivated agendas." Currier did not return multiple inquiries seeking elaboration.

Carla "K.C." Hanson, chairwoman of the Oregon Democratic

Party, called the recall effort a political stunt meant to undermine the results of the November election, which also gave Democrats a legislative supermajority.

"The GOP is embracing inflammatory rhetoric and pursuing a fool's errand by trying to recall a governor that voters reelected by a wide margin less than a year ago," she said. "Clearly, the GOP is scared of what's on the horizon for 2020."

Recalls were first staged in a handful of states in the early 20th century, an era of progressive political reforms, to remove public officials for corruption or ineptitude. Today, 19 states allow statewide recalls, 11 of them for any reason.

Until recent years, they have rarely been used as a political tactic to flip legislative seats or target governors over policy disagreements, said Jason Spivak, who tracks recalls nationwide and is a senior fellow at Wagner College in New York.

"Voters in general see this as not playing by the rules," he said.

New Mexico is among the majority of states that does not have the recall. This year, a Republican state lawmaker sought to change that.

Rep. Bill Rehm says the intent of his proposal was to honor the standard that recalls should be reserved for performance in office, not politics.

"I don't want it used as a political tool. And I don't want the public to use it as a threat," he said. "The public should have a way to get rid of me if I'm not performing."

The Democrats who control the New Mexico Legislature were not persuaded. Rehm's bill did not get a hearing.