



Business coalition pledges to pay for immediate purchase of safe drinking water filters

A coalition of local businesses, responding to a request for assistance to help neighbors, families and workers impacted by the water emergency declared in Morrow County have stepped up to pay for the installation of new or replacement water filters to ensure access to safe drinking water for those relying on wells that test above federal safe drinking water levels of nitrate contamination (greater than 10 ppm).

According to a recent news release, the business coalition was organized by Debbie Radie, VP Operations for Boardman Foods and supported by Torrie Griggs of the Boardman Chamber of Commerce and Boardman Community Development Association (BCDA), working in close cooperation with Morrow County Health Department officials to respond to this urgent community need. The local businesses participating in the coalition include Beef Northwest, Boardman Foods, Calbee America, Lamb Weston, Oregon Potato, PGE, Threemile Canyon Farms,



Torrie Griggs Boardman Chamber of Commerce/Boardman Community Development Association

and Tillamook County Creamery Association.

Griggs and Radie explained how the innovative community partnership would work:

Local businesses have committed to contribute enough private funds to the BCDA to financially support Morrow County Health Department with a Safe Drinking Water Filtration Project. The BCDA is an existing non-profit corporation with a public

mission and a demonstrated track-record of delivering community benefit results on projects in the Morrow County Enterprise Zone. The BCDA would steward the private contributions – being accountable for payment of invoices for filters purchased and authorized by the Morrow County Health Department. “All of us understand that this is just one important step in the community-wide strategy necessary to reach a sustainable solution to basin-wide concerns over nitrate contamination, that has been decades in the making,” explained Griggs, executive director of BCDA.

“Community business partners wanted to assure that there would be funds to pay for the immediate purchase of 350 new or replacement safe drinking water filters for our Morrow County neighbors, on wells that were tested and certified by the Morrow County Health Department at levels of nitrate contamination above federal safe drinking standards (greater than 10 ppm). This is just one more

County allocates \$100,000 towards nitrate-contaminated water effort

Morrow County has set aside \$100,000 to be used towards the high nitrate water problem in the Boardman and Irrigon area. The money will be used to pay for water distribution, temporary staffing help, porta potties for volunteers, and a professional media company to handle spreading information about the contamination and remediation efforts.

Nitrogen in north county drinking water is nothing new and has been present for many years, however, in January the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) fined the Port of Morrow nearly \$1.3 million (recently increased to \$2.1) for violating its wastewater permit by dumping excess nitrate on farm ground over a three-year period. The fine and accompanying publicity triggered an increased awareness and urgency to the problem, and subsequently spurred county government to declare a state of emergency over the water contamination. Health officials emphasize

the contamination is not present in any city water systems only private well water in the northern section of Morrow and Umatilla counties.

After the emergency declaration County Emergency Manager Paul Gray has been purchasing bottled water for free distribution to residents, as well as doing free nitrate well water testing. However, Gray came to June 22 County Commission meeting saying he needed more money to pay for those efforts and asked for approval of an emergency \$100,000 allocation.

Gray said he and a crew of volunteers have been set up a bulk water distribution station at Sam Boardman Elementary School in Boardman as well as buying “pallets” of bottled water for distribution in both Boardman and Irrigon. The county has also been doing the water testing for free.

The county has been joined in its effort by several north county businesses (see related story in this week’s Gazette-Times). Volunteers have been handing out the water and doing other tasks such as unloading the water trucks, and, while Gray says this is great, there is just not enough of them to handle the job, and he needs to hire temporary staff to keep the work going.

Commissioners voted 2-1 to approve the funds, with Commissioner Don Russell voting no, not because he was against distributing clean water, but

because he wanted to see a more complete budget on how the money was going to be spent. “I would like to see a real budget on this,” Russell told the other commissioners before the vote. “The only thing listed in here (the request from Gray) is porta potties for volunteers. That would supply porta potties for a long time. If we are really going to solve this problem, it’s not handing out water to people,” Russell reasoned. “It’s putting in filtration systems at the wells,” he emphasized.

Russell said he has studied the area around Boardman where the high nitrate levels are concentrated and found other reasons beyond just the port’s actions. “I look at the areas that have the highest nitrate concentrations and it is where a lot of people are living in small areas with septic tanks and drain fields. You can’t help but wonder if that is not a substantial part of the problem,” he stated.

Russell said the media has painted the problem as solely the fault of the Port, which he says is not accurate. “In the media we placed substantially all the blame on the Port of Morrow. I know looking at the data from DEQ that the land applicators (irrigators), the Port of Morrow and Lamb Weston contribute less than five percent of the (nitrate) problem.” Russell says these are the only entities that are regulated so the blame has fallen totally on to them.



Debbie Radie, VP Operations Boardman Foods

way to show how we work together as a tight-knit, family-friendly community in times of need,” added Radie.

For additional information, contact Morrow County Health Department at 541-676-5421 during business hours, or call Torrie Griggs at 541-481-3014, or Debbie Radie at 541-945-7001.

Public meeting to discuss Green firing

A public meeting has been called for Monday July 11 at 6 p.m. at Two Old Hags Pizza in Heppner. The topic will be a discussion on the recent firing of Morrow County Administrator Darrell Green. All interested members of the public are invited to attend.

For more information call 541-377-7874. Two Old Hags Pizza is located at 111 N. Court Street across from the courthouse in Heppner.

Highway chip sealing to start in Heppner

A major chip sealing operation covering 37 miles from downtown Heppner to Nye Junction will begin next Monday, July 11, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) has announced.

The chip sealing will start at the Les Schwab tire store in Heppner at 7 a.m. and then proceed down May Street across the bridge to Court Street. This in-town part of the operation is expected to take about four hours and residents are urged to avoid the area if possible. There will be no parking allowed in the downtown work area during the chip sealing.

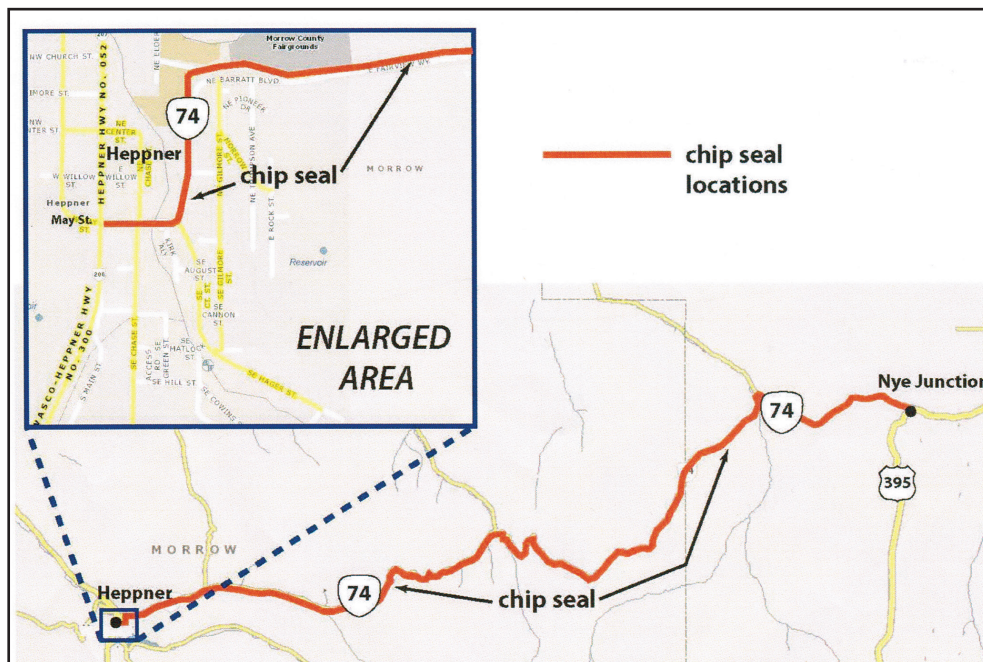
From there, work will continue down Court Street on Highway 74 east of Heppner 37 miles all the way to Nye Junction at the intersection of Highway 395. The project is expected to be completed in early August.

During the work ODOT officials say drivers can expect up to 20-minute delays, and they ask that driv-

ers reduce speeds, watch for loose rock on the roadway and be on the lookout for flaggers in the area. Pilot cars will be directing single lane traffic through the work areas.

Bicycle riders should prepare for traveling on rock chip covered highway surfaces and behind a pilot car, as ODOT says there will be no usable shoulders on which to ride. Ranchers, farmers, and property owners are asked to please keep farm equipment off the impacted highway sections during and up to two days after the chip sealing.

They also ask that irrigation pivots and lawn sprinklers be adjusted to keep water off the roadway. If you have plans for moving livestock on these highway sections, it is asked that you please advise ODOT District 12 Manager Paul Howland at 541-278-6044 first. “We greatly appreciate your support and cooperation during this paving operation,” ODOT officials said.



ODOT will soon be starting a major chip sealing operation starting in downtown Heppner and going all the way to Nye Junction.

Weather slightly cooler in June

According to preliminary data received by NOAA’s National Weather Service in Pendleton, temperatures at Heppner averaged slightly cooler than normal during the month of June 2022.

The average temperature was 61.3 degrees which was -1.8 degrees cooler than the normal average temperature for this month. High temperatures averaged 73.7 degrees with the high of 93 degrees being recorded on the 28th. Low

temperatures averaged 48.9 degrees with the low of 41 degrees being recorded on the 15th. There was one day with a high temperature above 90 degrees.

Precipitation was much above normal during June, totaling 2.60 inches, which was 1.25 inches above normal. Precipitation of at least .01 inch was reported on seven days. The heaviest amount of precipitation was 0.82 inches, which was reported on the 7th.

-See COUNTY ALLOCATES FUNDS/PAGE SEVEN

POLARIS
UPGRADE YOUR RIDE

ELEVATE YOUR ADVENTURE

NEW FOR 2022

CHECK OUT THE ALL-NEW 2022 POLARIS LINEUP. WE'LL HELP YOU LOCK IN WHAT YOU WANT.

Morrow County Grain Growers Inc.

CALL
541-989-8221
ext 204
for more information

WARNING: Polaris® off-road vehicles can be hazardous to operate and are not intended for on-road use. Driver must be at least 16 years old with a valid driver's license to operate. Passengers, if permitted, must be at least 12 years old. All riders should always wear helmets, eye protection, and protective clothing. Always use seat belts and call nets or doors (as equipped). Never engage in stunt driving, and avoid excessive speeds and sharp turns. Riding and alcohol/drugs don't mix. All riders should take a safety training course. Call 800-342-0761 for additional information. Check local laws before riding on trails. ©2021 Polaris Inc.

POLARIS | OFF ROAD