

Air quality issues lead to closures

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Smoke from wildfires burning around Oregon and nearby states has pushed Hermiston’s air quality to hazardous levels over the past week.

The Air Quality Index is the Environmental Protection Agency’s ranking of air quality on a scale of 0 to 500, categorizing air quality as good, moderate, unhealthy for sensitive groups, unhealthy for all, very unhealthy and hazardous, with anything over 300 considered hazardous.

On Tuesday afternoon, Sept. 15, Hermiston’s air quality was at 386, according to the Department of Ecology’s AirNow website.

Hermiston School District canceled school for the afternoon of Monday, Sept. 14, due to air quality. Human resources manager Jake Bacon said some of the district’s buildings, where



A smoky haze hangs over downtown Hermiston on Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2020.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

teachers broadcast lessons to students participating in distance learning, were experiencing deteriorating air quality.

“Some of the buildings

were getting a little hazy,” he said.

Other workplaces in Eastern Oregon also announced closures related to the smoke, including Wildhorse

Resort & Casino, which announced it was closing on Sept. 15, and not reopening until Thursday, Sept. 17.

The Umatilla County Circuit Court locations in Pend-

leton and Hermiston, and the Morrow County Circuit Court in Heppner will close each day at 3 p.m. for the rest of the week.

According to the Oregon Health Authority, Oregonians should be avoiding wildfire smoke as much as possible, particularly in areas deemed hazardous.

OHA states breathing in hazardous or unhealthy air full of tiny particles can cause health effects that include watery or dry eyes, a persistent cough or wheezing, scratchy throat, irritated sinuses, headaches, shortness of breath, asthma attacks or heart attacks.

The health authority states on its website that children, the elderly and those with heart or lung conditions are most at risk for serious side effects from unhealthy or hazardous air. They recommend that people with health conditions consult their primary care provider if their condition

gets worse while the smoke is in the air.

While people are indoors, OHA recommends they keep windows and doors closed and keep the fresh air intake on their air conditioning closed and the filter clean. They should avoid vacuuming, which stirs up the particles already inside the home, or doing activities that would increase air pollution, such as burning candles or smoking.

“Running a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter or an electro-static precipitator (ESP) can also help you keep your indoor air clean,” the website states. “If you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek shelter elsewhere.”

When driving, people should keep their windows closed and their air conditioning set to recirculate air inside the vehicle.

Graduate:

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“In the face of serious challenges, these students have shown a lot of heart and a lot of grit in staying focused on their educational pursuits,” said Oregon OSHA Administrator Michael Wood. “These awards represent an opportunity for us to help them as they continue moving forward on their respective paths.”

Anguiano stands out to be sure.

At Hermiston High School, not only did Anguiano help her family, but she worked several part-time jobs while also advocating in Salem and Washington, D.C., for career-technical education funding as part of the Family Career & Community Leaders of America. She served as executive vice president and president for Oregon FCCLA, and was even a candidate for a national officer role her junior year.

She also helped start the Health Occupational Safety Association at HHS, which is a career-technical education organization focused on health careers.

Anguiano remained active as she entered college in 2018.

At Whitman, she is double-majoring in American government/politics and Chinese language & literature, and is on track to graduate in May 2022. Anguiano envisions a career of helping build “mutual understanding among different diverse communities.”

Now tri-lingual, Anguiano hopes to one day work in international affairs, which is why learning the Chinese language and culture was so appealing. She spent a summer abroad in Kunming, China, the capital of the Yunnan province. She then went back that winter to visit friends she had made. A semester abroad in Shanghai this coming school year was put on hold due to COVID-19, but is expected to be rescheduled for 2021.

Though Anguiano dreams of possibly running for Congress “in the distant future,” she would like to first teach English in China while pursuing a master’s degree in the country.

“I need a break from education in the U.S. and experience something new,” she said. “I really enjoy learning from people who have a different background from me. I learn, but I also challenge others. It would be nice to just try something new.”

Echo:

Continued from Page A1

Gov. Kate Brown has convened a state task force of stakeholders to address the flooding, but Echo and Stanfield-area property owners along the river have also formed the Mid-Umatilla River Coalition, or MURC for short.

Slaght said the coalition hopes the end result of their efforts will be soundly engineered projects along the river that prevent flooding while also protecting the river’s ecosystem.

“You’ve got to protect the fish, you’ve got to protect the wildlife, but you’ve also got to protect human life and property,” he said. “We really need federal help to get different pieces of the puzzle rolling.”

Lloyd Piercy is one of the farmers who has been severely impacted by 2020’s floods. He estimated he lost 6 to 8 acres of his farm when the river changed course, not to mention the “devastating,” widespread destruction of assets, such as blueberry bushes and trellises. It took heavy equipment and weeks of work by hand crews to clean things up, which the farm had to pay out of pocket.



Staff photo by Jade McDowell, File

Trucks drive through a flooded road just outside Echo in February.

“Our crop was probably half of what it should have been, and we spent weeks after weeks scooping gravel out of there, trying to make it farmable again,” he said.

Piercy said he wants to see the Bureau of Reclamation fix its berms near his property that washed away during the flood, and to clear the tree trunks and other debris off dams and canal diversions along the river that he said pushed

water outward onto surrounding properties.

He said MURC was bringing together some “really energetic, bright people” to work on problems along the river, and he hopes the coalition is able

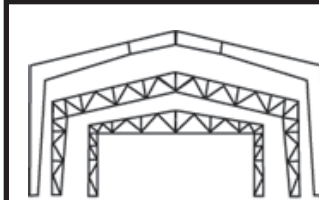
to effect those changes and others.

“I’ve had flooding every year for the last four years; this is just the worst of it,” he said. “It really does need to be dealt with, and it can’t just be one farmer.”



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