

EDITOR'S DESK

# Please drive carefully during winter weather

It's been a beautiful fall in the Columbia Basin so far, but it feels inevitable that the first icy roads of the season for Hermiston aren't far off. Already, the mountain passes east of Pendleton have closed at least twice for crashes in snowy weather.

As more people stay home than usual this winter and meetings over video chat have become the norm, we have an opportunity to reduce traffic fatalities this winter.



Jade McDowell  
NEWS EDITOR

According to preliminary data released in October by the Federal Highway Administration, traffic fatalities were down by about 2% in the first six months of 2020, compared with the first half of 2019. That's good news, but less positive when considering the same time period in 2020 saw a 16.6% decrease in overall traffic. That means while there were fewer fatalities total, there were more per miles traveled.

Experts have offered up several theories on this. People who are spending more time at home and are feeling higher levels of stress may be drinking and consuming drugs more, causing more impaired driving. Less traffic may also be encouraging people to feel comfortable engaging in other risky behaviors, such as speeding.

That's why it is important that we don't let down our guard this winter. All driving is a serious respon-



Hermiston Herald, File

A vehicle navigates a partially snow-covered road on Old Highway 30 west of Meacham in 2018.

sibility that, when taken lightly, can have disastrous consequences — death, injury, hospitalization, prison or large financial costs — but driving on slick roads and/or in poor visibility increases the danger.

In my decade as a journalist, I've seen the consequences firsthand. I've seen gruesome crash scenes with details I wish I could forget. I've seen the outline of the body under the sheet on the road, or the drips of blood left behind as someone was loaded into an ambulance.

In both my personal and professional life, I've seen what is left behind, too. I've interviewed victims' loved ones as they cried. I've interviewed people left paralyzed from

the neck down for the rest of their life, or written about people going to prison for accidentally killing someone while driving drunk.

I've seen friends and relatives commemorate the anniversary each year of the family member who was killed by an intoxicated or distracted driver. When I write about someone being killed in a crash, I usually seek out their Facebook page to see if we have any mutual friends in common, so I can be prepared for the conversation that often follows as that friend seeks me out to ask hard questions like, "Do you know if she suffered before she died?"

I know it's easy to rationalize that it won't be you. Many years ago I

used to text and drive occasionally, before this job cured me of it. It is true that most of the time those who think, "I won't crash if I look down at my phone for 5 seconds to send this text," or "I'm steady enough to make it home without a taxi," do make it home safe. But for about 40,000 people in the United States each year, that thought is their last thought.

A state trooper once told me he had responded to a fatal crash and found the dead woman's phone among the wreckage. Front and center was a grocery list she had been making as she drove, a half-completed word marking the last moment of her life.

There are no do-overs when it comes to car crashes. There is no, "I don't want to spend the rest of my life in this chronic pain from my accident so I'm going to go back in time and put on a seat belt."

So please, while you're driving, wear a seat belt. Drive the speed limit. When bad weather or icy patches hit this winter, slow down and leave more room for stopping. Keep your eyes on the road at all times. Turn your phone on silent and throw it in the back seat if it's too much of a temptation. Make sure any time you get behind the wheel of a car you're sober and wide awake.

When in any doubt, pull over and get some sleep, call a taxi, or call a friend who would rather pick you up at 2 a.m. than get a 3 a.m. call about your death.

COLUMN

## What is dyslexia, and how to help children cope

Dyslexia — what is it? Dyslexia is not simply letter reversals or not trying hard enough. With the advancement of technology, researchers have been able to observe the brain while people who struggle with reading are reading information. From this research, they determined people with the current definition of dyslexia often struggle with language development along with distinguishing sounds found in our language and transferring them to text.



Scott Smith

Language is a natural skill that we all develop at different levels, whereas text has been created by man. About 20% of the population's brains have difficulty processing human-created symbols. There is no correlation between intelligence or creativity. Dyslexics are often very visual and creative in their thinking.

Children who appear to be dyslexic often have a family history of dyslexia. The spectrum of dyslexia is wide and a person may only exhibit minor indicators, whereas

others may exhibit many indicators to an extreme. With early identification and frequent interventions, the characteristics can be minimized, making education and reading easier for children with dyslexia. Not hearing sounds in words and rhyming as a preschooler is an indicator, along with rapidly reading colors, objects or letters. With practice, preschoolers and kindergartners have no problem mastering these skills and move on to letter recognition and sound representations.

Normal reading patterns are pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic and consolidated alphabetic. Pre-alphabetic begins in preschool and increases during kindergarten. This is when the child begins to become aware that letters have meaning and begins to use visual clues.

Partial alphabetic is when the child knows their letter names and is becoming aware of sounds in words and linking them to the letters. This happens most often toward the end of kindergarten and during the start of first grade.

Full alphabetic awareness should be strong by the middle of first grade. Stu-

dents understand the phoneme/grapheme relationship and are able to blend words. Consolidated understanding should be mastered by the end of first grade and at the latest in the first part of second grade. This means the students are able to read decodable texts fluently along with being able to spell words applying their phonic knowledge.

Dyslexic students often exhibit other instructional difficulties, such as dysgraphia (inability to write coherently); visual processing issues; auditory processing issues; attention problems, such as ADHD; memory struggles; language development; mood swings; and coordination. One thing for sure is that dyslexia is not a determination of intelligence.

Dyslexia is not just found in one gender, though how the different sexes display frustration with dyslexia can be quite different. Boys most often become frustrated and become active, often leading to behavior problems. Therefore, they are often identified earlier. Girls many times become complacent and quiet. They are often not identified as having dyslexia until upper grades or even in college. Even though

they have the same struggles, many appear to be able to develop coping skills and are able to move through the system.

Dyslexia affects every person differently. They may have some of the same characteristics, but their brain makeup is different. Often, they have problems with spoken language, reading, writing and other subjects in school. But they may also deal with self-image issues and interactions with peers. It is something they deal with for life. They carry that worry and anxiety with them every day. Many times it leads to depression later in life.

Though there are weaknesses and struggles, many dyslexics have strengths that others may not have, such as thinking outside of the box. They are often able to imagine in a three-dimensional mode and are able to see the "big picture" when presented with projects. They usually love to problem solve.

These are all skills we need in every part of our society.

*Dr. Scott Smith is a 40+ year Umatilla County educator and serves on the Decoding Dyslexia-OR board as their parent/teacher liaison.*

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### KidWind program combines clean energy, education

Oregon's energy landscape is rapidly changing. Here among Columbia River communities, where most of Oregon's wind farms are located, we're fortunate to not just be a witness to our state's incredible growth in clean energy, but a key participant.

Importantly, this also means bringing renewable energy education into the minds of Oregon students. Through the support of the KidWind program, EDP Renewables (EDPR) believes this is a critical link to the success of clean energy in our state.

The inaugural REpowering Schools Awards recently took place to recognize the growing value of renewable energy education. EDPR was proud to receive the Industry Champion Award for our support of the KidWind program. KidWind provides several unique workshops that show how wind and solar projects work to inspire our next generation.

The awards also recognized the important relationship that takes place between local education and developers of renewable energy projects. Building support for KidWind in Boardman has meant working with educators like Rhonda Fox-Brennan, who twice has traveled across the country with her team of students to compete at the highest level at the National KidWind Challenge thanks, in part, to funding from EDPR.

Our drive to provide sustainable, clean energy for our state helps the environment and the economy, but it also means taking our commitment one step further to support the education of Oregon students looking to enter the workforce.

These recent awards are a great reminder: supporting the growth of renewables in Oregon means affordable energy — and new careers — for decades to come.

**Jarod Wizner, operations manager  
Rattlesnake Road/Wheat Field Wind Farm  
Umatilla**



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Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

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No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

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