



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

🚒 The wreckage continues to release smoke Feb. 23, 2022, at Shearer's Food, Hermiston. Scott Stanton, chief of Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, described the blaze that occurred Feb. 22 as the largest the district fought in a decade.

Fire of the decade

Shearer's Foods, local governments commit to helping the processor's 230 employees

By ERICK PETERSON • Hermiston Herald

The day after an explosion and fire at Shearer's Foods, Hermiston, smoke still rose from the scorched ruins.

Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 firefighters, having spent a late night at the scene Feb. 22, returned at 10 a.m. Feb. 23, sorting through rubble to put out remaining hot spots. Fire officials said they expected to remain working at Shearer's "for a while," stating they were not quite sure when work would be complete.

Jimmy Davis, operations chief for the district, said he was weary, and he was not the only one who felt this way.

"Our guys are exhausted," he said.

A hard day at Shearer's Foods

Davis said the work was especially difficult on the first day of the fire because the inside of the building had collapsed. When the fire was at its greatest, the walls remained, he said. According to Davis, this situation made it so firefighters had difficulty reach-

ing certain sections.

This was not the only problem firefighters faced, Davis said, and firefighters pulled out of the scene at around 10 p.m. Feb. 22.

"We weren't making much progress," the operations chief said.

Water valves on the fire trucks were freezing in the cold temperatures. Firefighters were "exhausted and cold," too, he said. There were 73 firefighters at the scene, according to Davis. These firefighters came from "all over" Umatilla and Morrow counties. Nineteen firefighters, he said, worked on water shuttles, bringing much-needed water to the fire.

The engine to the pump of the facility's water supply broke, he said, and there was only one hydrant firefighters could access on the road. The lack of water



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Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 firefighters shift through the wreckage Feb. 23, 2022, to put out remaining fires from an explosion the day prior.



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Snow was on the ground on Feb. 24, 2022, as workers continued to clear rubble from Shearer's Food.



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Tony Castro and Jason McCary of Emerald City Statewide set up fencing Feb. 24, 2022, around the wreckage of Shearer's Foods, two days after the explosion.

was significant in the attack on the blaze.

"We knew we weren't going to be able to put it out," he said.

Firefighters worked to protect large tanks on the property that store chemicals, he said, and firefighters held the flames back from nearby totes that also contained flammable materials.

"We were able to keep it away from that," he said. "That was the big thing."

The Shearer's Foods explosion could have been even worse, he said, especially when

considering air quality.

"Don't get me wrong, whatever was in there and burned was putting up some nasty stuff," he said.

Looking at the wreckage of Shearer's, Davis said the fire had "burned through a lot of what could burn."

The work on Feb. 23

Davis said he left Shearer's at 2 a.m. on Feb. 23. He woke at 6 a.m. to take his children to school and begin Day 2 at the fire scene. By 10 a.m., he was

able to acquire an excavator and bring it to the site. Four or five firefighters were with him.

"Today, we're just working on tearing down these walls and trying to get what we can on the outside," he said, motioning to twisted remains at the scene.

The one firetruck on the scene followed the excavator, as firefighters put water on remaining hot spots. Davis said they would not be able to put out the fires entirely.

See Fire / A8