

February 15, 2021

To: The Oregon Legislature House Special Committee on Wildfire Recovery

From: John M. and Kathleen Waite Idleld Park, OR Archie Creek fire victims 9/8/20

Topic: OVERALL PROBLEMS and PARTICULARLY ASH AND DEBRIS TESTING AND REMOVAL

We applaud your request to hear our side. Our experiences, observations and needs follow.

Fire recovery here is sad and sorry. No building-related, cleanup of ash or debris has been done by any government agency other than perfunctory and misunderstood Phase I Household Waste (It only addressed a safe environment for the real testers to come but was construed otherwise by many.) Victims have been given ever-extended start dates for Phase II since December 1, 2020.

Cleanup is now stopped because of lack of a correct plan for debris disposal as winter rains intensify ash contamination. We researched disposal way last October. Oregon follows Federal Standards. Two Oregon DEQ employees advised us verbally and in writing that ash and debris is considered contaminated, cannot be left to sit and depending on its nature, requires varying disposal methods. FEMA, DEQ, EPA and Oregon State know that. It's a no-brainer that testing is first required to determine presence and nature of contamination. It is inexcusable that over five months, no provision for required testing and disposal was made.

Lack of effective communication and cooperation between and among the many agencies, contractors, help organizations and victims lays at the very heart of our problems! That statement is an oft heard, seldom acted on, cliché. It really means some people and agencies are incompetent or don't care all seemingly without penalty. When FEMA and its minions do communicate it can be condescending, insulting, accusatory and even threatening to local people we know are working for our benefit. The further a controlling agency is from a problem, the less their understanding and care for Oregon's unique particulars. We are just Oregon hicks to some of them you know.

This whole operation suffers mightily from lack of effective operations monitoring, oversight and accountability. Who is in charge? What has been done to anticipate, avoid, plan, institute action and alleviate snafus? When and how will things change? What are the penalties for such malfeasance?

Wrong prioritization of action and effort accentuates the problems above to insure this "Recovery Action" is buried in red tape, misconstrued, twisted and bumbling. To meet primary purposes, all organizations must operate to first help private fire victims, then, looming environmental damage (those two overlap). Then come all other actions including, minimally important at this stage, concerns as parks, water seeps, 6"-diameter fire killed trees, dead brush, dinky and intermittent flows, logging ODOT's rights-of-way, cultural sites and other low priorities. Wrongly prioritized, continuing actions have so far eaten up at least two months of valuable time and money while solving no pressing problems. Required testing should and could have been done or carried on simultaneously with the goofy studies. You may be told such action had to done to protect future workers. Bunk, there are many properties that have no hazard trees (taken by Pacific Power or contractors) nor any situation under the purview of this untimely study. Planning for testing was done for controller convenience.

Please hear a few of our experiences and findings. Despite several ignored verbal and written requests for governmental observation, and our also ignored request for pre-notification, of Phase I

operations, our septic tank adjacent the N. Umpqua River was crushed. It would have leaked directly into the river if we had not taken action to have the tank pumped and do emergency drainage work because our fine onsite drainage system was also destroyed. Our foundations were severely damaged rendering them useless. Another: I twice, recently spoke with two employees of CDR McQuire (contracted by ODOT, I think.) They were frustrated and bored and told me they had been walking the same short stretch of road for three weeks, reviewing ODOT right-of-way looking for timber ODOT will salvage. Hardly the critical people and environmental protection we need now. One more: ODOT as controller, let a contract to an Oregon firm to do our area's ash and debris removal and cleanup. The firm moved in about 20 machines to do the work in early January and was told January 11, 2021 was the start date. On that date work was denied by "officials," all of a sudden, it had been learned by officials that contamination testing had to be done (duh). Now, five critical weeks having passed and that firm has not been allowed to turn a wheel. YET, the questionable McQuire and ODOT operations continue. Is emergency recovery money being used to finance ODOT's logging and low priority actions while victims wait? The hired contactor is justifiably angry, as are we.

As time flies by, insurance "Loss of Use" time and money limits grow ever closer for insured victims. I wonder how some will pay rent if controllers here remain unaccountable, waste time and money while failing to get the required work done. Will it happen before we all go broke? I reemphasize, signs of correct priorities, oversight, accountability, critical communication and money use meeting the primary purposes of recovery are few and far between. Besides local organizations, and sometimes government, no caring and little common sense is observable. Now FEMA, its contractors and vast staff may be good knives. All knives require sharpening--do it. If they will not take an edge then they need rebuilding or replacement. They are simply tools, not our masters, created for our needs.

WE NEED: and all are important.

- 1- **Adequate, dedicated funds for Oregon individual fire victims without threats of their being pulled, stolen or transferred. Are they now running low due to wrong usage?**
- 2- **Local, near-the-victims control of decisions and funds. Cut senseless red tape.**
- 3- **Timely cooperation and flow of information by all parties that is polite and professional.**
- 4- **Review of the need for, duplication of and extreme costs of "Consulting Contractors" as CDR McQuire, AC Disasters, and others. How many vultures are affordable?**
- 5- **Full accountability and processes oversight including discipline, suspension and firing.**
- 6- **Provide victims full copies of test results. (Insurance-wise, this is very important to us.)**
- 7- **Please do not allow, or indulge in, hiding behind easy excuses of too few people and resources or problems never before seen. Demand earning of pay and accountability.**
- 8- **Insure fast actions including your reaction time. The longer the status quo the more contamination grows, "Recovery" becomes a cruel joke as victims' difficulties grow.**
- 9- **Uniform, clarify or change landfill requirements by legislation or dictate. That is the immediate stumbling block here and should have been addressed long ago.**
- 10- **Enlist the influence and power of Federal legislators regarding FEMA and its minions.**

We urge you to move rapidly to insure recovery's primary objectives. People are trying to do right. They will only wait so long before being forced to move on their own; environmentalists won't like it.

John and Kathy Waite - Idleld Park, OR