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September 19, 2008

For Immediate Release

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Baker County receives funds to conduct hazardous materials exercise

Due to a partnership between the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM), the Fire Division of the Baker County Office of Emergency Management, and the Randall E. Carpenter Foundation, more than seventeen local, state and federal agencies participated in a railroad hazardous materials response training and exercise September 12 and 13 in Baker County.

Ten fire departments and districts from throughout Baker County along with the Baker City Police and representatives from the Oregon Department of Forestry, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Union Pacific Railroad, and Red Cross participated in classroom training and a mock outdoor exercise depicting a train derailment of hazardous materials. The training and exercise served to update Baker County emergency responders on railroad response strategies and tactics and allowed them to practice response skills.

“This training is a good example of local leaders coming together to increase the skills and knowledge emergency responders need to keep their communities safe,” said State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr. “The training also allows agencies to examine and practice their guidelines for an interagency response to any catastrophic event.”

Funds for the training and exercise came from a Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness grant administered by the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal. The Randall E. Carpenter Foundation also provided needed funding for fuel, allowing departments in outlying areas of Baker County to participate in the exercise.

“These funds from the OSFM and the Carpenter Foundation allowed Baker County fire agencies to train together on railroad hazardous materials incidents,” said Baker County Emergency Management, Fire Division Manager Gary Timm. “While this training had a railroad focus, the information and hands-on exercise will apply to a variety of hazardous materials incidents the fire service might encounter.”

Participating agencies included: Baker City Fire Department, Baker County Emergency Management-Fire Authority, Baker City Police, Baker Rural Fire Protection District, Eagle Valley Rural Fire Protection District, Greater Bowen Valley Rural Fire Protection District, Haines Fire Protection District, Huntington Fire District, Keating Rural Fire Protection District, La Grande Fire Department, OSFM Regional HazMat Team 12-LaGrande, Powder River Rural Fire Protection District, Union Pacific Railroad, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Department of Forestry, and the Red Cross.

In 2004, Baker County enhanced the Office of Emergency Management through the creation of the Baker County Fire Authority to provide a county fire liaison to assist federal, state, and local fire agencies with the integration of fire education, planning, training, and countywide response.

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