



Forest Service News Release

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Burning waste disposal pit along Historic

Columbia River Highway – continued closure for firefighting activity

HOOD RIVER, Ore. (September 19, 2024) — The area closure associated with the Microwave Tower fire remains in effect on all National Forest System (NFS) lands within the fire perimeter on the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Ongoing hazard mitigation activities continue, especially at the waste disposal site located along the Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail, between Hood River and Moiser. Although the fire perimeter is contained, the area closure will need to remain in place until it is safe for the public to regain access to the area.

The objective of the closure is to proactively protect public and firefighter safety as the Scenic Area actively works at a smoldering abandoned waste disposal site, that has been issuing noxious gases and smoke as the contents continue to consume. The disposal site was once used as a place for orchard waste, automobiles, and other debris prior to the land becoming Federal lands.

Because of the uniquely toxic nature of these burning fuels, the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area implemented an air monitoring contract and continue to consult with Federal and state air quality experts, to ensure the safety of local communities and firefighters who are working the disposal site. Initial results revealed elevated particulate matter, which is the typical for wildfire smoke, however, elevated levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) were also detected in the area, and concentrated directly in the burning pit. As a result, firefighters are using personal protective equipment (PPE), including breathing protection and specialized equipment, while working in the area. Air monitoring continues while firefighters work to put it out.

“Firefighters continue to work daily to extinguish the smoldering disposal site as soon as possible, while keeping the safety of personnel and our communities the top priority” said Nicolas Granum, Deputy Forest Supervisor for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. “Please respect the fire closure to allow work to continue and avoid the area while toxic smoke continues to impact the trail.”

NEWS RELEASE, continued

Smoke may be visible on Interstate 84 as excavating work continues. Please be aware that exposure to hazardous smoke can have adverse health effects, especially for individuals with known respiratory issues. We ask that the public avoid the area and this section of the Historic Columbia River Highway Trail while ongoing mitigation work continues.

A detailed map and description of the Microwave Tower closure area is available on the Scenic Area website and at our office. Closure barriers and signs have been posted on the ground.

For more information regarding the Microwave Tower Fire, please contact:

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area:

Information: (541) 308-1700

www.facebook.com/crgnsa

Twitter: @CRGNSA

Details of these closures are also available on state and local websites at:

<https://www.hoodrivercounty.gov/closures> and <https://stateparks.oregon.gov/>

Additional information about the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is available at:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/crgnsa>

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Photo: An excavator works in the waste disposal pit alongside a firefighter. USDA Forest Service photo by Josh Voshall, Mt. Hood National Forest.