

The Register-Guard

Opinion

Prevent toxic disasters like one killing 1,000 trees

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Have you enjoyed gazing at the majestic ponderosa pine trees along U.S. Highway 20 near Sisters? These trees are now dying. The U.S. Forest Service reported that “an unhealthy dose of the weed-killer Perspective” killed more than 1,000 mature ponderosa pines along the scenic byway.

Starting in 2013, Oregon Department of Transportation contractors applied the strong weed killer to a long stretch of the highway, ostensibly to kill weeds. The public wasn't alerted until 2018 that the herbicide percolated through the porous, volcanic soils into the groundwater and poisoned 1,000 trees on public land.

The tragedy was preventable. Application instructions warned Perspective shouldn't be used near the roots of sensitive trees like ponderosa pine. After absorbing the herbicide, these trees cannot be saved.

On May 30, Beyond Toxics filed a formal Report of Loss with state agencies on behalf of all Oregonians robbed of this public natural resource. The public needs proof that profits from logging the trees are used to develop non-toxic roadside maintenance practices. Let's prevent further herbicide disasters.

These native trees, now dead, had been part of a forest ecosystem. ODOT's routine of spraying poisons along highways harms Oregon's air, soils and ground water.

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