

Drivers Urged To Be Safe As Sturgis Rally Nears

STURGIS (AP) — The South Dakota Highway Patrol and Highway Safety officials are reminding motorists and bikers to drive safely ahead of next week's annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally.

Lee Axdahl with the State Office of Highway Safety says there have been 11 fatalities involving motorcycles so far this year. South Dakota saw 14 motorcycle fatalities in 2011. Statistics show that 30 to 40 percent of motorcycle fatalities occur in West River counties during the period around the annual rally.

Axdahl is urging both motorcyclists and motorists to be especially cautious during the rally, which runs Monday through Aug. 12.

Dead Fish Caused By Several Factors

STOUX FALLS (AP) — The Department of Environment and Natural Resources says low flows, high water temperatures and elevated ammonia levels contributed to hundreds of fish that died and washed up along the Big Sioux River.

The department says its investigation showed the ammonia levels in the river would not have normally been toxic to the fish. But combined with the stress from the low flows and high temperatures in the water, the ammonia level was enough to kill the fish last week.

The temperature of the Big Sioux River reached 90 degrees last Friday, lowered to 72 on Saturday and was back up to 90 by Tuesday. River flows had dropped to 28 cubic feet per second on Friday on parts of the river. River flows normally average 250 cubic feet per second.

Heidemann, Jones Advance In Neb. Regents Race

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A state senator and an insurance agency executive have won the primary election for a University of Nebraska Board of Regents seat representing the southeast part of the state.

State Sen. Lavon Heidemann and David City insurance agent Mike Jones now advance to the November election for District 5.

Heidemann, an Elk Creek farmer and state lawmaker, is leaving the Legislature after this year because of term limits. A third candidate, former regent and forensic pathologist Robert Prokop, was defeated.

District 5 includes portions of western Lancaster County and 16 southeast Nebraska counties.

The candidates are vying to replace Regent Jim McClurg of Lincoln, who is retiring after this year.

SD Man Accused Of Shooting At Fiancee Pleads

FORT PIERRE (AP) — A South Dakota man charged with attempted murder after allegedly shooting at his fiancee has pleaded guilty to the lesser charge of aggravated assault.

Attorney General Marty Jackley says 39-year-old Ronald Berens Jr. of Fort Pierre faces up to 25 years in prison because he is considered a habitual offender. He is to be sentenced June 26.

Authorities say the April 29 shooting began as a domestic violence incident at the residence Berens shared with his fiancée. Berens was accused of firing one shot inside and two more outside. One of the shots hit a home. No one was hurt.

Mitchell Looks At Smaller Corn Palace Plan

MITCHELL (AP) — The Mitchell City Council is looking at a pared-down plan to improve and expand the Corn Palace.

A plan unveiled in January was estimated to cost at least \$35 million, but a committee has presented the city council with a new plan that would cost between \$10 million and \$12 million.

Doug Dailey, chairman of the Next Generation Corn Palace Committee, says the panel knows the first plan was excessive.

The Mitchell Daily Republic reports (<http://bit.ly/Jmemnk>) the new plan would renovate the adjacent City Hall to become part of the Corn Palace. It also would update the building to add street-level mosaic tiles, an observation area, improved lighting and a new dome.

The building is hosts sports and other events. Its exterior is decorated with murals made of corn.

Johnson Praises Renewal Of Charter

STOUX FALLS (AP) — Sen. Tim Johnson is praising the Senate's passage of legislation to renew the charter of the Export-Import Bank.

The bill reauthorizes the bank for three years and raises its lending cap from the current \$100 billion to \$140 billion.

Johnson, who chairs the Senate Banking Committee, says the higher lending authority will ensure the Export-Import Bank can grow to meet the future needs of American exporters.

The South Dakota senator calls the bill an important step in supporting American businesses and workers.

Johnson says a failure to reauthorize the bank would have put American exporters at a steep disadvantage to their international competitors and put at risk nearly 300,000 American jobs.

Omaha Police Work To ID Woman Found Dead

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Omaha police are working to identify a woman whose body was found in a northwest Omaha creek.

Officers were called to the area Tuesday morning after witnesses spotted the body in Cole Creek near Blondo and 78th streets.

Homicide investigators are looking into the woman's death to determine how she died.

5 Runaways Accused In S.D. Armed Robbery

SELBY (AP) — Five teenagers are in custody after allegedly running away from a treatment center, stealing guns and a vehicle and holding up a gas station in the north central South Dakota town of Selby.

Authorities say the teens ran away from a Corson County treatment center on Monday, rummaged through cars and found guns in Mobridge then broke into an auto shop east of the town and stole a van.

The robbery in Selby occurred about 3:30 a.m. Tuesday. Authorities say the teens pointed a shotgun and a rifle at the clerk and fled with cash and tobacco. An officer in Potter County later pulled them over. Authorities say the teens tried to flee on foot. Three were caught immediately and the other two after a search by land and air.

S.D. Tribe Hasn't Used Grant To Fight Meth

WAGNER (AP) — An American Indian tribe in an area of southeastern South Dakota where some people say the illegal drug methamphetamine has become rampant has not used a federal grant to hire a detective to combat meth use.

The Yankton Sioux Tribe received \$157,252 for a detective in 2010 through the federal Justice Department's Community Oriented Policing Services program, better known as COPS, the *Argus Leader* newspaper reported.

"I'm not exactly sure why they haven't hired one," said Mario Red Legs, special agent in charge for the Bureau of Indian Affairs' South Dakota office, which supervises the Yankton Sioux tribal police.

Tribal Chairman Thurman Cournoyer, who was elected last September in a hotly contested race against his cousin, said political squabbles have gotten in the way.

"When I got here, the meth program was really in limbo," he said. "There was a lot of finger-pointing, and it just kind of didn't go anywhere."

Tribal officials discussed the hiring of a meth officer on Wednesday but Cournoyer said little progress has been made in creating the position.

"When I got here, the meth program was really in limbo. There was a lot of finger-pointing, and it just kind of didn't go anywhere."

MARIO RED LEGS

"We haven't even advertised for it," he said.

Some area residents have organized a group to combat what they believe is a meth epidemic that is being ignored by authorities. Last month, in response to the death of a 2-year-old girl in a rural Wagner housing development, several people protested what they say is lax enforcement of drug laws. On Monday, about 100 people gathered in Wagner for a walk in memory of the girl, who was under the care two adults authorities say were using meth and other drugs at the time she died. Wagner's police chief also stands accused of trying to cover up his girlfriend's meth use by hiding her used needles in his office.

"Dealers and users are arrogant about it," said Frances Zepher, a tribal member and protest group organizer who once was in

charge of the tribe's defunct methamphetamine awareness program. "They have no shame in using or selling it."

Charles Mix County State's Attorney Pam Hein said she wants to see greater cooperation among the BIA, local law enforcement and federal agents.

A law enforcement partnership called the "Safe Trails Task Force" uses the combined resources of state, federal and tribal agents to investigate drug crimes on South Dakota's reservations. The task force's work has led to two major drug indictments in Indian Country this year. However, no Yankton Sioux officer is a member of task force.

U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson said such cooperative efforts are necessary to tackle endemic drug problems in impoverished reservation areas where state, city and tribal jurisdictions cross. Hein agrees, saying she hopes to see the partnership expand into Charles Mix County so those who fight drugs can work together more effectively.

"Law enforcement works together really well around here," Hein said. "Sometimes the powers that be over other issues don't work together as well."

Audit Criticizes UNL's Handling Of Contracts

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A new state audit has found some six-figure contracts with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln were not competitively bid, and employees didn't report others to the university's Board of Regents as they should have, though there was no evidence of misappropriation or impropriety.

The Lincoln Journal Star reports the audit examined the university's process for paying 49 of 3,202 vendors for services and equipment in 2011. It found five instances in which contracts were signed by university staff not authorized to do so, and seven contracts that should have been reported to the University of Nebraska Board of Regents but weren't.

The report also found one instance in which an \$880,351 change order to contract with Hausmann Construction for work on the Davaney Center Practice

Facility was not approved by Chris Jackson, the vice chancellor for business and finance, as required by university policy.

"There is an increased risk contracts are not appropriately entered when UNL's process is now followed," State Auditor Mike Foley wrote. "In addition, there is an increased risk of projects running longer and costing more when appropriate individuals are not made aware of change orders, addendums or contract extensions."

University spokeswoman Kelly Bartling said the university generally agrees with the report, and will follow auditors' suggestions. Bartling said the six- and seven-figure contracts cited by the auditor simply reflect the large amount of business the university does each year, rather than a pattern of financial mishandling.

"We need to review and clarify and strengthen some of our

processes," she said.

Foley said the UNL Procurement Services Department, which Jackson oversees, cooperated with his staff.

"When we do this kind of work, we are very meticulous. We really dig. When you do that, you're going to find things," he said.

"It actually was a very positive, constructive audit," he added.

Among the audit's findings: • A \$470,600 contract with Lutz, Daily and Brain LLC was not approved by the regents as required. In the report, the university argued the contract actually was between Nebraska Utilities Corp. and Lutz, Daily and Braun, a claim the auditor contested.

• Two of 11 vendors the audit examined that did more than \$150,000 of business with UNL did have purchases competitively bid, and the university did not have evidence it couldn't ac-

quire competitive bids as a result of a particular vendor being the only one able to provide a service.

• The university bought \$52,726 in fuel from Whitehead Oil rather than from its prime vendor, Sapp Brothers, but couldn't provide documentation to explain why. A prime vendor is one the university recommend its departments use.

• The university did not have procedures in place to ensure staff obtained the best price available for purchases of science equipment and research materials made outside its prime vendor, Fisher Scientific Co. The auditor found eight instances in which the university paid \$793 more for materials and equipment than it would have if it had gone through Fisher Scientific.

Iowa And Neb. Ethanol Output Cut Amid Drought

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Ethanol plants are voluntarily slowing production as corn prices climb and supplies tighten amid a widespread drought that has generated discussion about whether more of the crop should be devoted to food production.

Ethanol production nationally has dropped by 20 percent since the beginning of the year and is at a two-year low, said Bob Dinneen, CEO of the Renewable Fuels Association, a national trade group.

The production drop-off is similar in Iowa, which produces about a third of the nation's ethanol, and in Nebraska, the No. 2 ethanol producer, it's down by about 30 percent, industry officials said.

Ethanol plants in some states have temporarily halted production, including three of the 24 in Nebraska. The plants had planned to shut down for a week routine maintenance but extended that for a month, said

Todd Sneller, administrator at the Nebraska Ethanol Board, a state agency responsible for developing the ethanol industry. Also, a plant in Aurora, Neb., that was supposed to start up in June has postponed its opening.

All of Iowa's 41 plants remain in operation, although they are producing less.

Some environmental and livestock groups have lobbied Congress to pressure the Environmental Protection Agency to relax its Renewable Fuel Standard, which requires the fuel industry to use about 12 billion gallons of ethanol a year. Critics say the requirement diverts too much corn from food to fuel production, increasing food prices.

The ethanol industry says cutting production would have a minimal impact on food prices but would make fuel significantly more expensive, hurting most families.

Wildfires Reported Near Big Nebraska Reservoir

OGALLALA, Neb. (AP) — Several wildfires have blackened dozens of square miles of rugged terrain near Lake McConaughy in western Nebraska, officials said Friday.

No injuries and no damage to buildings have been reported, but officials said the fires have threatened at least half a dozen structures.

Officials think the fires likely were touched off by lightning on Thursday afternoon, Ogallala radio station KOGA reported.

Keystone-Lemoyne Fire Chief Ralph Moul estimated that the Otter Creek fire on the north side of the lake has blackened nearly

63 square miles and was burning out of control Friday morning.

The next biggest fire was estimated at nearly 12 square miles and was burning in the northeast corner of Keith County. Fire crews were hampered by canyons and the hilly terrain.

The McKeag fire just north of the Keith and Arthur county line was believed to be contained at nearly 4 square miles.

But north of Brule on the south of Lake McConaughy, the Eagle Canyon Hideaway fire was burning uncontained and had threatened to damage some buildings.

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Catherine A. Wright, M.D.
Board Certified Otolaryngologist



Beth J. Beeman
Au.D, CCC-A



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Au.D, CCC-A



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SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION NOTICE OF REQUEST FOR STATEMENT OF INTEREST

The South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) in conjunction with the Sioux Falls Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the City of Sioux Falls is soliciting Statements of Interest from engineering and planning consulting firms to conduct the I-229 Major Investment Corridor Study.

Those interested in submitting a Statement of Interest should download the complete Notice of Request for Statement of Interest from the SDDOT webpage:
www.sddot.com/transportation/highways/planning/specialstudies/Default.aspx.

Statements of Interest should be directed to Mr. Steve Gramm, P.E.; Office of Project Development, SDDOT; 700 East Broadway Avenue; Pierre, SD, 57501-2586; and must be received no later than August 17, 2012 at Noon Central Daylight Time. Both one hard copy and one electronic copy (Adobe PDF format preferred) of the Statement of Interest must be included in the submittal. Questions regarding this Request for Statement of Interest should be emailed to Mr. Steve Gramm, P.E. at steve.gramm@state.sd.us by 5:00pm, August 9, 2012.

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