



News Release

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Residents Warned to Stay Away From Area Canals Due to Trespassing Laws and Drowning Dangers

With area irrigation canals running full and the weather heating up, Treasure Valley water users have cautioned residents to stay away from irrigation canals due to drowning dangers, and to be aware of state laws that prohibit trespassing on private property.

“Children and adults drown in irrigation canals every year because they simply do not understand how very dangerous canals can be during the irrigation season,” said Roger Batt, Executive Director of the Treasure Valley Water Users Association.

Canal banks are not public walking or recreation areas, they are private property that belongs to irrigation districts. Many area canals are marked with special signs that warn people that they are on private property, signs which are blatantly ignored.

“We are having people walk right past locked gates with “No Trespassing” signs on them.” said Greg Curtis, Water Superintendent for the Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District.

Irrigation district and canal company managers believe that a good share of the problem comes from the huge growth in the Treasure Valley. Many come from urban areas or locations where there is no canal-based irrigation system.

“Those folks probably just want to take a walk with their kids or their dogs alongside a small stream. They see the access road used by ditchriders and maintenance crews and don’t understand they are trespassing in a very dangerous place. They don’t realize just how steep canal banks are and how dangerous the cold, deep and swift flowing canal water is for individuals,” Batt added.

Another form of trespassing is also leading to a surge in encroachment incidents along canals in the Treasure Valley. Residents whose property abuts canals are planting flowers and vegetable gardens, doing landscaping, even putting small storage

buildings on the canal right-of-way, activities that are prohibited by Idaho's irrigation laws.

This kind of encroachment problem can restrict or even block access to irrigation delivery maintenance crews whose job is to keep the canal system in good shape. Access blockages are especially crucial if irrigation crews are responding to problems such as trash buildup causing the water to backup and spill over the canal bank, leaks and breaks in the canal that can eventually grow into breaches in the bank, and searches for individuals who have fallen into the water.

"If a property owner has a legitimate reason for wanting to place something in the canal right-of-way, they need to first get specific permission from the irrigation district or canal company. The law also gives irrigation districts and canal companies the right to remove those things and pass the costs on to the property owner," Batt said.

Residents with questions about encroachment issues or other safety or water supply issues should contact their irrigation district or canal company office that owns the canal in their area.

The Association has recently launched a broad media outreach campaign in an effort to educate Treasure Valley residents about trespassing on canals. Officials say it is designed to help new residents understand the role and requirements of irrigation districts and canal companies in their mission of supplying crucial irrigation water to water users across the Valley.

"Our irrigation delivery entities want to work with and be good neighbors with the thousands of area residents who live close to or alongside our more than 1,000 miles of canals and laterals. We hope that this outreach can help provide useful information and a better understanding about safety and trespassing issues that will allow us to work together with the community," Batt said.

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