

GPRXROUBNC
RELAY TO SECTIONS 2,3,AND 4
ROLBWLCJLARDOFWKSI

REGIONAL OFFICE
ALL R-6 FORESTS

5-19-80

0900 PDT

1600

GIFFORD PINCHOT NF

MT. ST. HELENS ERUPTED 8:32 AM 5-18-80 WITH A BLAST THAT FLATTENED THE VEGETATION IN AN AREA AT LEAST 8 MILES DEEP AND 15 MILES WIDE NORTH AND WEST OF THE MOUNTAIN. EXACT WIDTH OF THE AREA IS UNKNOWN BECAUSE OF THE HEAVY ASH CLOUDS WHICH DRIFTED TO THE NORTHEAST. MUD AND ASH FLOW INUNDATED SPIRIT LAKE AND EXACT CONDITION OF THE LAKE IS NOT KNOWN.

FIVE FATALITIES WERE ATTRIBUTED TO THE HOT GASSES AND ASH FROM THE ERUPTION. A SIXTH IS A RELATED ACCIDENT WHERE A PILOT IN THE YAKIMA AREA FLEW INTO POWERLINES OBSCURED BY THE ASH CLOUDS. SOME 27 PEOPLE ARE MISSING, INCLUDING TWO USGS/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PEOPLE ON THE MOUNTAIN WHEN IT ERUPTED. THE FATE OF HARRY TRUMAN, THE MAN WHO REFUSED TO LEAVE HIS SPIRIT LAKE HOME AS LATE AS SATURDAY IS UNKNOWN.

USGS ESTIMATES SPEEDS OF THE MUDFLOWS AT 40-80 MPH. THE COWLITZ AND TOUTLE RIVER DRAINAGES ARE FLOODED AND I-5 WAS CLOSED PERIODICALLY AT THE TOUTLE RIVER.

DURING THE NIGHT, THE OBSERVATION PLANE REPORTED LIGHTNING ACTIVITY ON THE MOUNTAIN, AS WELL AS MAJOR WILDFIRES TO THE NORTH AND EAST. ONE HAD REACHED A MILE IN SIZE. SHENK'S CLASS 1 TEAM IS ON STAND-BY IN PORTLAND, BUT WILL NOT BE COMMITTED TODAY BECAUSE SAFETY IS UNCERTAIN.

ALSO DURING THE NIGHT THE ASH PLUME CONTINUED, REACHING 11,000-14,000 FT AND DRIFTING NORTHEAST. SPOKANE REPORTED AT MIDNIGHT TO HAVE A HALF-INCH OF ASH, WITH OTHER REPORTS OF ASH DRIFTING ACROSS IDAHO, MONTANA, AND EAST OF THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE.

JOE NADOLSKI
PIO
PH