

May 13, 2008 — When a light rain fell in Lassen County the evening of Sunday, May 4, it left more than raindrops on vehicles and house windows, and a number of residents wondered what this white or grey gunk was all about. Media outlets in Reno reported the milky rain was from ash carried halfway around the world from a forest fire in Russia.

Later in the week a Westwood resident reported yellow clouds over Dyer Mountain during the day and red clouds at night. The resident suspected some nefarious cloud seeding was dropping chemicals on people and making them sick.

But other residents in Westwood said there were no unusual clouds and the source of sickness in town was nothing more than an active flu bug.

Dan McDonald, an employee at the Lassen County Department of Agriculture Weights and Measures — the county agency responsible for air pollution issues — said the milky rain came from ash from the large fires near Susanville last year.

“It was pretty windy that day,” McDonald said. “We had a pretty big fire last year, more than 100,000 acres, and I think the wind was picking up ash from that and dropping it on us.”

McDonald doubted the ash came from a fire in Russia because that kind of pollution would show up on one the county’s air monitoring devices.

And he said while Collins Pine in Westwood used to seed clouds to increase rainfall, but he didn’t know if the company was still doing that. Even if they were, he said that wouldn’t account for the milky rain residents experienced.

According to McDonald the residue wasn’t corrosive and washed off easily.