

Search and Rescue: Curtail risky activities

Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue (SAR) is asking Central Oregonians to curtail outdoor activities that put them at risk of needing rescue. The agency is concerned about the potential impact on search and rescue volunteers and on medical services as the region deals with the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are currently seeing many people turn to the outdoors for recreation and exercise right now, which is allowed by Governor Brown's executive order 20-12," said DCSO Public Information Officer Sgt. William Bailey. "I understand that the ability to be outside and exercising helps maintain our mental and physical health during these trying times. This increased outdoor recreation has recently led to numerous lost and/or stuck motorists on snow-packed forest roads as well as lost hikers, snowshoers and snowmobilers."

Rescues are more complicated right now because of COVID-19 restrictions.

"The majority of our search and rescue missions are carried out by our DCSO SAR volunteers," Sgt. Bailey explained. "They are selfless heroes who like everyone else across the nation are prioritizing their own health and the needs of their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you get lost or injured and require SAR assistance, you are placing the SAR volunteers in a position where they may have to break social distancing requirements to rescue you. You may be potentially taking the SAR volunteers out of the rotation should quarantine protocols become necessary."

The SAR is asking all outdoor users not take part in high-risk activities. These activities include backpacking, climbing, backcountry

skiing and snowmobiling, or any other activity that puts people at risk for potential rescue. Those who venture out are asked to stay on well-established trails, do not go alone, tell a responsible person the details of their plan, and take extra supplies in case of an emergency.

"You will also be relying upon an already stressed healthcare system should you be injured, which will divert fire and hospital resources away from their pandemic response," Sgt. Bailey said.

Additionally, travelers are urged to avoid snow-packed forest roads, as snow depths are hard to determine at times and manageable turnaround points can be rare.

Sheriff L. Shane Nelson said, "Please do your part to keep yourself, your family, and our community safe. We are all in this together to do our part to lessen the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. If you choose to go outside to exercise and recreate right now, we want you to be conservative and take the extra steps to do so safely."

Oregon sees record unemployment

During the week of March 15, the Oregon Employment Department received more than 76,500 initial claims for Unemployment Insurance benefits.

During the first three days of the week of March 22, initial claims have been tracking at record levels again. This comes as a sharp increase from 4,900 initial claims filed during the week of March 8.

The Employment Department is taking several measures to meet the unprecedented need for unemployment benefits, which is largely due to reduced hours and layoffs related to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.

The Employment Department has enhanced the performance and stability of the online claims system. Over the past two weeks, the agency also hired new employees, shifted existing staff working in other program areas, and trained them, doubling the number of employees working on unemployment claims.

Record levels of unemployment claims cause longer wait times, as the department works to gather and process the details factoring into each individual

claimant's eligibility and weekly benefit amount. We encourage Oregonians who have lost their jobs to file claims using the online system to lower wait times by phone, <https://secure.emp.state.or.us/ocs4/index.cfm>.

A new video from the Employment Department shows step-by-step details for filing an online claim, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUhgLFKIVE&feature=youtu.be>.

The department also continues to offer job seeker and employer services, including more phone and virtual options for appropriate social distancing.

The Employment Department's COVID-19 webpage (https://govstatus.egov.com/ORUnemployment_COVID19) serves as a resource guide. It includes an overview of the unemployment insurance program, along with questions and answers about specific COVID-19 coronavirus-related situations and

unemployment benefits.

The Employment Department has also enacted temporary rules, adding more flexibility for unemployment benefits to help Oregonians affected by COVID-19 business closures.

Of the 76,500 initial claims filed, the Employment Department has detailed information for the 22,800 claims processed during the week.

The leisure and hospitality sector, which includes hotels and restaurants, saw the greatest number of initial claims for unemployment benefits (10,700). This reflects some of the early impact of public health and safety measures.

Many initial claims also came from workers in health care (2,100) and retail trade (1,400).

Multnomah, Washington, and Lane counties had the largest number of processed claims during the week of March 15.

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