Oregon OSHA offers COVID-19 videos to help farms

EO Media Group

SALEM — Oregon OSHA announced it has launched a free educational video to help employers and workers understand the requirements of a temporary rule that strengthens protections against the spread of the coronavirus in employer-provided housing and labor-intensive farm operations.

The 12-minute video — available in English (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VZB15dsxEo&fe) and Spanish (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9xQAo-QYTwY&fe) — uses engaging graphics and concise narration to give an overview of the rule's three key parts: field sanitation, labor housing and transportation.

Roy Kroker, consultation and public education manager for Oregon OSHA, said in a press release the agency created the video to help employers and workers who operate in this industry to understand the requirements of the rule.

The video's topics include the appointment of physical distancing officers and other rule changes in field sanitation and housing operations. It also addresses requirements in transportation.

The video is intended to supplement — not replace — a careful reading of the rule.

The rule stems from a March 20 request to immediately adopt requirements related to such housing and operations. Instead, Oregon OSHA treated the request as a petition for rulemaking and put it on a faster evaluation track than normal.

The division reviewed more than 120 comments as part of the public process.

The division delayed enforcement of the rule, most of which took effect May 11, until June 1 in response to requests from employers for more time to comply. The rule will remain in effect until no later than Oct. 24.

Learn more about the rule at https://osha.oregon.gov/covid19/Pages/default.aspx or call 503-378-3272.

To learn more about Oregon OSHA, visit osha.oregon.gov/Pages/index.aspx.

TAX

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allowing farmers to calculate their cost of inputs by subtracting their labor expenses from their overall operating costs, rather than using the "costs of goods sold" definition.

Now, farmers will be able to reduce their tax liability by whichever expense is greater: labor or inputs, Dresler said. "We needed to create a mechanism that actually worked."

Aside from these revisions, the bill has also clarified that crop insurance payments farmers receive for lost crops aren't considered taxable revenue, since they generally don't totally offset financial losses.

Sales to farm cooperatives were exempt from the tax under the original version of the law, which excluded most revenues earned by Oregon dairy farmers.

However, this provision left out a handful of dairies that don't sell to cooperatives — under HB 4202, their milk revenues will now also be exempt.

Despite these improvements for farmers, Oregon corporate activity tax remains "bad tax policy" that reduces the competitiveness of agricultural businesses, said Jeff Stone, executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries.

"We're not an ATM," Stone said.

The organization had requested an exemption for the farm industry, which often operates on thin profit margins, or at least a gradual phase-in of the tax, neither of which was approved during the special session.

"Is it what we asked for? No. Does it solve all the problems we foresee? No," Stone said. "Are we grateful it provides some relief? Yes."

CUTLER

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journalism as a senior sportswriter for Ontario's Argus Observer in 2000 before being promoted to sports editor shortly after in 2001. He then spent time on the Boise State University sports beat for the Idaho Press-Tribune before returning to the Argus Observer in 2004 in a dual role as sports and news editor.

Cutler later spent time as managing editor of the Capital Journal in South Dakota, where he and his newsroom were awarded the 2008 South Dakota Newspaper Association General Excellence Award for the state's daily newspapers with a circulation under 16,000. It was the first time the Capital Journal had earned the award in 126 years of existence.

Cutler was also a part of general excellence award-winning newsrooms at the Argus Observer and Rapid City Journal, and he led the La Grande Observer to a second-place finish in general excellence for the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association Division C category.

While in La Grande, Cutler spent three years in a joint role as editor and publisher.

"Andrew Cutler's knowledge of Eastern Oregon, and his experience as both an editor and publisher, made him the logical successor to head up the company's editorial team in this region and take on the publisher role here in Umatilla County as well," Brown said.

A 1990 graduate of Fruitland High School, Cutler joined the U.S. Army in 1991 and served as a combat medic in Germany, Fort Stewart, Georgia, and Honduras before his discharge in 1995. He went on to earn an associate of arts degree from Treasure Valley Community College in 2000 and a bachelor of arts degree in multidisciplinary studies from Boise State University in 2016.

Billions of dollars in aid for small businesses go unclaimed

By Joyce M. Rosenberg
Associated Press

Photo by Christopher Dolan/The Times-Tribune via AP

In this June 26 photo, Barber Mike McAndrew holds a mirror as customer Rob Verrastro looks at his new haircut at Three Saints Barbershop and Shave Parlor in Jessup, Pennsylvania. Billions of dollars Congress allocated as a lifeline to small businesses were left on the table when the government's Paycheck Protection Program stopped accepting applications for loans Tuesday.

NEW YORK — Billions of dollars offered by Congress as a lifeline to small businesses struggling to survive the pandemic were left on the table when a key government program stopped accepting applications for loans.

Business owners and advocacy groups complained the money in the Paycheck Protection Program was not fully put to work because the program created obstacles that stopped countless small businesses from applying. For those that did seek loans, the ever-changing application process proved to be an exercise in futility.

"It was a flawed structure to begin with," said John Arensmeyer, CEO of Small Business Majority, an advocacy group. "It favored established businesses. It was set up to give money to people with strong banking relationships."

The program's shortcomings also made it more difficult for minority businesses to get loans, according to a report from the Center for Responsible Lending, a research group.

The loans were designed to give companies devastated by government-ordered shutdowns money to pay staffers and survive. The money was aimed at small businesses such as restaurants, retailers and salons that are desperately trying to stay afloat as the U.S. economy reopens in fits and starts.

As of late Friday, the Small Business Administration had approved more than 4.7 million loans worth nearly $518 billion. Small businesses that also included medical offices, dry cleaners and manufacturers obtained money that ultimately saved jobs and eased the unemployment rate from April's staggering 14.7% to May's still-excruciating 13.3%.

But more than $140 billion in loan money remained unclaimed out of $659 billion allocated by Congress. It will be up to Congress to decide what to do with any leftover funds, an SBA spokeswoman said.

Some banks rejected any companies that did not have multiple accounts. Sole proprietors and freelancers had to wait a week before applying, and many found they could not supply the kind of documents the government and banks demanded.

The program's biggest appeal was its promise that loans would be forgiven, but confusion abounded about requirements owners had to meet to get that forgiveness.

Those requirements and information about the program kept changing: Between March 31 and June 15, the SBA issued 35 changes to program rules and its frequently asked questions, according to a Government Accountability Office report issued last week. It was not until May 22, seven weeks after the program began, that the SBA and the Treasury Department released the first instructions and applications for loan forgiveness.

"It's been a moving target this whole time," Arensmeyer said.

In the dark and struggling with the effect of shutdowns, many owners said, "no thanks."

Gabriella Borrero, co-owner of The Vault, a Boonton, New Jersey, recording studio, said she was uncomfortable with the possibility the business, which had been shut for three months, could be burdened with a loan if it could not get forgiveness. And she could not determine up-front how much money might need to be repaid.

"We decided to simply tough it out ourselves and make it through by dipping into our savings," she said. "I'd rather not have this looming thought, 'Are we going to have it forgiven or will it come back to bite us?'"

For many small business owners, a big drawback was the law's original requirement that companies use loan money within eight weeks, with a June 30 spending deadline. That gave businesses such as restaurants two undesirable choices: recall laid-off workers immediately and risk having to lay them off again after eight weeks, or wait to use the money and then have to repay part of the loan.

"We knew it was a problem a week after the legislation was signed, when we looked at the shutdown orders," said Karen Kerrigan, CEO of the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council, an advocacy group. At that point, it was clear businesses were going to be closed longer than initially thought, and the impact of the virus would be felt well after June 30, she said.

Not until June 3, less than four weeks before the deadline, did the Senate give final approval to extending the time frame to 24 weeks.

The law also required companies spend 75% of their loan money on payroll to get forgiveness. But some businesses, including closed restaurants, needed money for rent and costs to reopen. They also worried about being stuck with a loan. Congress did not lower the payroll requirement to 60% until June.

"It was too late for many companies," said Todd McCracken, CEO of the advocacy group National Small Business Association. He summed up the program as "poorly designed from the start."

The program did not account for the vast differences among small businesses. Many hire freelancers or independent contractors rather than employees and under the program could not include those workers' compensation in calculations for loan amounts. Even when these owners were able to get loans, they were of little help.

"It seemed to be structured by people who might not know how small businesses are run," said Frank Groff, co-owner of Portland's White House, a bed and breakfast in Portland. The B&B's workers, including cleaning services and landscapers, are independent contractors. Groff got $12,000, but it only covered two managers' salaries. The bed and breakfast has remained open during the outbreak, but its revenue is down nearly 75%.

Also at a disadvantage: Sole proprietors who don't have employees, owners who work as freelancers and brand-new businesses.

Sole proprietor Michael Gips started his security consultancy at the end of 2019, had no revenue and so did not have the required tax return showing his business income. The first bank he applied to never reviewed his application. He then applied to an online bank, providing documents to show he was making money in early 2020.

"My application was denied for insufficient proof of salary payments," Gips said. As of Monday, he was waiting to hear about a third application.

Tiffany Joy Murchison, who owns a New York-based publicity firm, submitted her application April 3, the day the program began. The bank rejected the application on mistaken grounds that her account had not been open long enough, then took three weeks to correct the problem.

It took another three weeks before Murchison learned that her application was denied because it "didn't show we needed that amount of money." As the deadline approached, she was trying to get paperwork together that would get a loan approved, but was afraid she was running out of time.

Many businesses have gotten the message that the program isn't for them.

When Akosua Ayim looked at the requirements, the CEO of Equal Space realized her co-working space in Newark, New Jersey, was unlikely to get much help. All its workers are independent contractors. But what convinced her not to apply was news that companies such as restaurant chain Shake Shack and the NBA's Los Angeles Lakers were easily able to get millions in the first round of funding.

MOVE

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their family."

The 21-and-older section includes shuffleboard, tabletop games and activities and slot machines. Both sections will receive full service from the bar and kitchen.

The venue change also marks the company's first exploration into food service. To start, Cornford said, the menu mostly will be fried food. As employees are trained on the use of a brick oven, pizzas, sandwiches and pasta will be added, and eventually steaks and burgers will make their way onto the menu as well.

The plan for Friday's opening is to allow people to sit and hang out. The opening might not include the new menu, however, as the hood for the fryer still is being installed.

Plans to move began formulating in October 2019 and became a reality a week ago, Cornford said.

While there have been some bumps, such as securing contractors, Cornford said he is excited to see this place coming together with the help of the building's owners, the Penningtons, who have done a majority of the construction work.

"With the customer service that we have, I feel most of our customers will follow us down here, and I am hoping to bring in new ones," Cornford said.

Cornford said they are setting up the new location with returning back to Phase 2 opening in mind but will follow all state guidelines for COVID-19 safety, including spacing out diners and requiring employees to wear masks.

Photo by Sabrina Thompson/EO Media Group

Seth Pennington works on the outside awning at the new location of Tap That! Growlers, 1106 Adams Ave., La Grande. The business has moved and is venturing into food service at the new location, which opens Friday.