

OEM director says treat mass shootings like other disasters

By **TERRI HARBER**
Medford Mail Tribune

SALEM — The director of Oregon's Office of Emergency Management says Oregon isn't doing enough to prevent mass shootings.

Mass shootings should be given the same emphasis — and emergency managers should use the same tools — as measures to stop other disasters such as fires, floods and construction mishaps, said Andrew Phelps, director of Oregon's Office of Emergency Management.



Phelps

"We tragically lost nine Oregonians in our 2020 Labor Day wildfires, an event that led to sweeping changes to our laws and hundreds of millions of dollars in investments to protect Oregonians from similar wildfire disasters," Phelps told the Mail Tribune May 26, two days after the mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas, that killed 19 students and two teachers and injured 15 others at Robb Elementary School.

"Yet, when nine Oregonians

lost their lives in the Umpqua Community College shooting in 2015, we saw no significant change," said Phelps, who has led the state agency since January 2015.

"This is a lightning rod of a policy issue that's caused so much divisiveness, while our collective inaction continues to cost lives," he said. "From an emergency management standpoint, we must strip away any specific political agenda or ideology and take action to reduce our risk from mass shootings as we do with other hazards."

Phelps said his job is to protect Oregon communities from all hazards and to reduce shared risk.

"A massacre like the Uvalde mass shooting is by every measure a disaster. So was Parkland, and Sandy Hook and Umpqua Community College right here in Oregon," Phelps wrote on Twitter May 25. "Emergency managers need to lead policy discussions about reducing THIS risk, one that has taken more lives than wildfires or flash floods or earthquakes in this country over the past 25 years."

Emergency managers provide



Jae C. Hong/The Associated Press, File

A law enforcement personnel lights a candle outside Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, Wednesday, May 25, 2022. Desperation turned to heart-wrenching sorrow for families of grade schoolers killed after an 18-year-old gunman barricaded himself in their Texas classroom and began shooting, killing several fourth-graders and their teachers.

advice to elected and government officials about how to mitigate risk from disasters and need to be comfortable doing the same thing when working to mitigate the risk of mass shootings, he said in an interview.

Many disasters aren't "natural," but are the result of choices and policy decisions, he

said on Twitter.

Maximizing the safety of new construction projects, for example, includes recommendations that can be seen as controversial, such as land use and building codes about how and where to build, he added. Reducing risk often means "change this policy, adopt that

code or amend these laws."

With mass shootings, emphasis has been primarily on managing consequences and not on prevention. The Columbine High School shooting in Colorado in 1999, in which 12 students and a teacher were killed and 20 others were injured, prompted conversations about infrastructure hardening on school campuses, Phelps said.

Adding panic buttons and double locks have improved safety, but emergency managers must begin providing input about policy and legislation that could prevent these shootings, he said.

Because there are so many issues related to mass shootings, trying to prevent such crimes may require a patchwork of mitigation strategies.

For wildfires, flooding and construction safety, emergency managers rely on advice from experts in those areas. To prevent mass shootings, law enforcement, advocacy groups and other knowledgeable people could be consulted, Phelps said Monday.

"And we can look at what's worked across the nation," he added.

When Oregonians are most likely to get lost in the wilderness — and why

By **JAMIE HALE**
and **DAVID CANSLER**
The Oregonian

PORTLAND — The call came in at about 10:30 in the morning: An employee at the Bonneville Fish Hatchery in the Columbia River Gorge had spotted a plume of smoke coming from the cliffs at Munra Point. It wasn't a forest fire — it looked more like a smoke signal.

Soon, a team of nearly two dozen search and rescue volunteers and coordinators had arrived, loading their packs with ropes, medical supplies, food and extra clothes. Crews determined that the smoke signal was coming from a man who was stuck on the cliffs, and it looked like he might be in rough shape.

Brian Gerkman, head search and rescue coordinator for the Multnomah County Sheriff's office, was on the scene that May morning. Aside from the quick-witted smoke signal, it was typical of many search and rescue missions in Oregon — a stranded hiker, unprepared for the elements, in need of a technical rescue from the

wilderness.

"He was not prepared to go hiking," Gerkman later said of the man on Munra Point. "Certainly not prepared to spend the night on a cliff."

That rescue was one of 364 in Oregon through May this year — part of a continuing trend of rescue missions that peaks every summer as more people find outdoor adventures in farther-flung wilderness areas.

Like clockwork, the number of search and rescue missions in Oregon begins rising along with temperatures in May, according to an analysis of statewide data since 2011 by The Oregonian. It climbs again in June before peaking in July, with an average of 122 rescue call outs — or nearly four a day.

Sunny August remains nearly as high, recording the second most missions of the year.

Scott Lucas, the statewide search and rescue coordinator for the Oregon Office of Emergency Management, said the spike in summer is simply about there being more people outside doing a wider variety of activities. Snow-

melt gives better access to the mountains, and warm days drive people to rivers, lakes, beaches and forests.

It's not necessarily that there's more reckless or dangerous recreation in the summer, he said, there are simply more people recreating.

Just five Oregon counties account for roughly half of all rescue missions year-round: Jackson, Lane, Deschutes, Clackamas and Douglas. Lane, in particular, peaks in the summer, recording more calls on average than any other jurisdiction in June, July and August.

Lucas said Lane County is unique because of the vast diversity of terrain it covers, stretching from the Cascade Mountains to the Oregon coast. In the summer, when that whole area becomes more accessible, search and rescue teams typically have their hands full.

"If they're not rescuing people out in the water, they're saving people in the snow," he said of the rescue crews.

While Lucas said the statewide numbers are certainly higher than they were a few decades ago,

they have more or less remained consistent over a decade — even as the state's overall population grew by about 10%.

In 2021, Oregon recorded 1,078 search and rescue missions in Oregon compared to 1,049 missions in 2011. In that time, annual numbers spanned between

a low of 924 missions in 2015 and a high of 1,305 in 2019.

"I think if you were to keep the population the same for 10 years and not have anyone new come into Oregon, we'd have really low numbers," Lucas said.

Although stressful and often scary for those

involved, most search and rescue missions are success stories. Since 2012, nearly 99% of rescue missions ended with lost or stranded people found alive, the department said. In that time, 99 people died who were reported missing or lost, and 80 were never found.

Survey shows mixed feelings about tourism among Oregonians

By **SUZANNE ROIG**
The Bulletin

SALEM — Oregon's natural beauty is the No. 1 draw for visitors, but breweries, restaurants and shopping rank second, according to a survey by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center.

But with that attraction comes angst from residents who feel tourism makes biking, hiking, fishing and camping more difficult to enjoy, according to the May 6-12 survey of 1,674 residents 18 and older.

"More people are moving here, and there are already too many people," said Daniel Olson, a 75-year-old-plus Deschutes County resident. "Ultimately it increases traffic and drives up costs, especially housing."

Olson's comments mirror the survey, where 61% of the respondents believe that tourism causes

traffic in their community.

But two-thirds of those surveyed believed that tourism brings benefits, particularly economic ones, which is the same as when surveyed in 2021, according to the center.

Just about half of those surveyed supported a tourist fee for peak seasons that can be given to the affected communities. The survey showed that 51% believe tourism contributes funds to public services, 48% said it provided a high quality of life and 48% said it offered well-paying jobs.

Despite the criticism of tourism, most surveyed recognized the benefits to the state and foresee an increase in visitors this summer will be a positive for their community, according to the survey.

About eight in 10 residents 75 and older say tourism contributes to a strong economy. But among the 18- to 29-year-

olds that belief drops significantly to 58%, according to the survey.

More than half of those surveyed in the under 30 age group — 56% — believe tourism contributed to the lack of affordable housing, according to the survey. But about 34% to 50% in all other age groups surveyed believe tourism is a contributing factor to the lack of affordable housing, according to the survey.

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center is an independent, nonpartisan organization. The center partnered with Pamplin Media Group and the EO Media Group, which owns The Bulletin.

Of note is that one-third of those surveyed in the under 30 age group say recreational marijuana is a tourist draw, according to the survey.

The survey has a margin of error of about 2.4%.



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