

Rural Oregon counties striking first

Umatilla is one of the latest counties to put a psilocybin service center ban on the November ballot

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — The next drug debate is coming to an Eastern Oregon ballot in November.

On Tuesday, July 5, the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted to put a ban on psilocybin manufacturing and service centers on the Nov. 8 ballot. Psilocybin is the active ingredient in hallucinogenic mushrooms, and research has indicated it may be a useful drug in treating a variety of conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

Oregon voters legalized supervised therapeutic use of psilocybin in 2020, but the commissioners reasoned that since 62% of Umatilla County voters rejected the measure, they deserve another chance to weigh in.

“Because our citizens spoke so loudly about (how) we don’t want it, we want them to have the opportunity to opt out again,” Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer said.

Umatilla County joins several other counties in asking their voters to consider banning the psychedelic drug from being sold in the county’s unincorporated areas before a state-managed system takes effect in January.

In Linn County, a commissioner said he feared access to psilocybin might lead youth to “doing things that may cost them their life” as the board sent the issue to the ballot. Jackson County commissioners approved a psilocybin referendum even as a company makes plans to turn a resort in Ashland into a psilocybin therapeutic retreat.

Shafer anticipates more local ballot measures in the future.

“I think you’re gonna see a lot more counties take the same action we took,” he said. “Our neighbors to the west, Morrow County, did it before we did. I think you’re going to see a domino effect come on, especially on the eastern side of the state.”

The trend is reminiscent of 2016, when the state gave local governments the ability to opt out of legal cannabis sales. Many Eastern Oregon cities and counties justified outright bans by citing the regional split in support of 2014’s Measure 91, which legalized the creation of a recreational market.

But some communities in the region saw a shift in opinion after cannabis became legal. Two years after Umatilla County voters soundly rejected Measure 91, Pendleton residents voted to allow sales in 2016 as recreational cannabis was revealed to be a tax boon for local governments.

Pendleton wasn’t alone. Other Eastern Oregon cities like Ontario, Sumpter and Huntington also opened their doors to cannabis sales. Some Eastern Oregon communities have benefited by selling to residents of Idaho, where cannabis — and psilocybin — remain fully illegal for recreational or medicinal use.

Although some communities in the region have embraced cannabis sales, Shafer said the lack of state regulation over illegal grows is another reason Umatilla County residents could be concerned about psilocybin.

Oregon National Guard bars unvaccinated soldiers from drills

State and nation’s citizen-soldiers must secure medical or religious exemptions or get vaccinated

By **GARY A. WARNER**
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon National Guard is barring members who have not followed orders to be vaccinated against COVID-19 from taking part in military duties, officials confirmed Thursday, July 7.

The action could lead to termination or delays in pay and some benefits, according to a U.S. Department of Defense announcement. Continued refusal could lead to separation from the military altogether.

“This is a lawful order and is in line with other required vaccinations for readiness of the force,” said Lt. Col. Stephen Bomar, spokesperson for the Oregon National Guard. “As with other mandatory vaccinations, legitimate medical and religious exemptions will be acknowledged with respect,



EO Media Group, File
The Oregon National Guard is barring members who have not followed orders to be vaccinated against COVID-19 from taking part in military duties, officials confirmed Thursday, July 7, 2022.

compassion and dignity.”

The Department of Defense issued an order in August 2021 that all military personnel be vaccinated against COVID-19. The Army said the announcement this week would affect about 62,000 service members out of a total force of more than 1 million soldiers.

About 97% of the 8,000 members of the Oregon National Guard have complied with the order by getting vaccinated, starting the vaccination process, or going through the administrative approvals to get exemptions or accommodations, Bomar said.

The Oregon National Guard declined to provide an exact number of members not in compliance or seeking waivers, citing privacy and appeals processes.

If 97% of the Oregon National Guard is in compliance, that would leave 3%, or about 240 members.

Bomar said decisions on exemptions are scheduled to be completed by October 1.

“No adverse actions will take place against Guard members with pending or approved exemption requests,” Bomar said.

Options to appeal

If a service member’s permanent medical exemption or religious accommodation request is denied,

they have the right to appeal that decision within 30 days.

If the appeal is unsuccessful, the service member has the option of being vaccinated or being considered to have refused the order to be vaccinated.

“The specific number of days from receiving a final denial to being considered to have refused the vaccine is scheduled to come out in a future order,” Bomar said.

Summer is the time when many National Guard units go through their mandatory two-week training, often working with active-duty personnel. Ahead of those assignments, the U.S. Army said it would enforce vaccination deadlines that had been previously announced.

“Members of the Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve who have refused the lawful Department of Defense COVID-19 vaccination order without an approved or pending exemption may not participate in federally funded drills and training and will not receive pay or retirement credit,” according to the Army’s July 7 statement.

The order has the biggest impact on the Army,

which accounts for just under half of all uniformed personnel and 75% of all National Guard members.

The overwhelming majority of service members have complied with the order. The Army has just over 1 million soldiers in service, with 480,000 on active duty. There are 336,000 National Guard members and 189,500 U.S. Army reservists.

“Maintaining readiness continues to be among the U.S. Army’s highest priorities,” said a statement from the U.S. Army command at the Pentagon near Washington, D.C. “We are fully committed to ensuring all soldiers are vaccinated against COVID-19.”

The Pentagon said 40,000 National Guard members and 22,000 reservists were not yet in compliance with the order.

Since the pandemic spread to the United States in early 2020, the U.S. Defense Department has worried about the impact of the virus on military readiness around the globe. Non-uniformed personnel were moved off-base at many installations. Troops went through quarantine periods before and after deployments overseas.

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