

New state regulations for agricultural industries

Washington governor supersedes L&I's farm-safety rules

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OLYMPIA — Gov. Jay Inslee on May 28 proclaimed new safety rules for agriculture, superseding regulations issued by the Department of Labor and Industries in mid-April.

The governor's rules require farm workers, unless working alone, to wear cloth masks. Other new rules will require daily temperature checks, hand washing at appointed times and hand-washing stations within 110 yards of every worker.

Inslee acknowledged the rules will be challenging to implement. "I think we've come up with a really good product in tough circumstances," he said.

Tight timing

Washington Grower League Executive Director Mike Gempler said farmers will have to move quickly to comply.

"This is really painful. It's a lot to take in, especially at the beginning of harvest when you're already at peak chaos," he said. "What's worse is having an outbreak. That's when things get shut down."

Inslee issued the rules under his stay-at-home order. The governor's office has gradually prescribed coronavirus-safety rules for occupations ranging from carpenters to dog walkers.

"It's getting quite ridiculous," said Dan Wood, executive director of the Washington State Dairy Federation. "It's frustrating to have the governor's office going business by business, job by job, how we're going to operate. They need to stop the daily show and say, 'Here are standards to be safe.'"

The governor's agricultural rules will apply to orchards, dairies, fields, and fruit and vegetable packing houses.



Gov. Jay Inslee

Workers feel better

Farmworker unions had complained the rules L&I issued were not detailed enough. United Farm Workers National Vice President Erik Nicholson joined Inslee at the press conference announcing the rules. "We're feeling much better about the clarity," he said.

Nicholson said some growers already have gone "above and beyond" in protecting workers from the coronavirus. "We've also talked to workers about fears they have and these rules go a long ways in addressing many of

the issues farmworkers have consistently raised with us," he said.

L&I's previous rules required physical distancing, frequent hand washing, regular cleaning, isolating sick workers and educating employees about preventing the transmission of the virus. The governor's rules retain all those basic requirements, but add more detailed regulations.

For example, farmworkers must wash their hands for more than 20 seconds at least five times during a shift, plus after using a restroom. "High-

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touch surfaces" must be disinfected prior to the workday, and before and after breaks and lunch.

"I'm really concerned about compliance and employers being cited for non-compliance and a lot of it is how your employees behave," Gempler said.

Employers must check workers' temperatures every day. If the temperature is 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, the worker will be considered to have a fever. Workers also must be questioned daily about whether they or anyone they live with have symptoms of the virus.

"We are concerned that some of the requirements of the governor's proclamation are excessively specific and may not be possible for many growers to achieve with one week's notice in the midst of an unprecedented global crisis," Washington State Tree Fruit Association President Jon DeVaney said in an email.

"Since the advent of COVID-19 our biggest challenges have been inadequate supplies of personal protective equipment and other resources needed to fully implement best practices" he said.

Transportation

The governor also issued more extensive rules for transporting workers than did L&I. Drivers of company vehicles must wear masks and be separated from passengers by plastic or plexiglass barriers. Passengers must wear face masks and follow seating arrangements prescribed in the rules.

"It's going to be a heckuva challenge to move people around with these very restrictive requirements," Gempler said.

The governor's proclamation did not change rules set by L&I for farmworker housing. The rules for working in fields reaffirm that workers in one housing unit can be put in bunk beds if they are segregated from the rest of the workforce. Inslee called it a "cohort" strategy.

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Q: How do I get clematis to grow? I have tried several that did not take and would like to try again.

A: Make sure the vine does not get damaged in the planting process. A crimped vine will die, but come back from the roots. Be careful sliding it out of the pot. Another common problem with clematis is clematis wilt. It is a soil borne fungus that can kill the plant. To avoid it, plant your deciduous vine two inches deeper in the soil than it was in the pot. Also, growing varieties not prone to the disease is a great option. We sell an evergreen variety as well as the Montanas and viticellas. You should have much better luck with one of these varieties as they are less prone to the fungus.

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