

DRIVER ...

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But for the continued scofflaw, the amount of money owed builds up quickly. The court assesses an additional monetary penalty and then sends the account to a collections agency, tacking on a 28 percent collection fee to boot.

The collections agencies each have their own license reinstatement programs, with their own payment rules. The Oregon Department of Revenue is one of the agencies providing collections service to the Josephine County courts.

According to Richard Hoover, public information officer for the Department of Revenue, the beginning down payment required is \$200, just as with our local program, but if someone repeatedly becomes delinquent, that down payment

requirement can rise to \$800, payable each time the debtor re-enters the program.

“But the monthly payment amounts will vary, depending on the balance owed and the debtor’s ability to pay,” he said.

Hoover noted that his agency will issue a garnishment if a debtor has identifiable income or assets.

There is a third option available, although it occurs only once a year and not many debtors chose to avail themselves of it. It happens at the Reinstatement Fair, a one-afternoon event put on every September by the Josephine County addiction treatment community. Representatives of social service organizations from throughout Josephine County are there, as well as representatives of the county probation department, drug and mental health courts, Grants Pass Police and the DMV. It is quite the gala, with musicians, poets, free

food, free haircuts, face painting, and even county parole and probation officers in a dunk tank. Last year 350 people attended.

Teal said that the courts have been participating in the event for six or more years.

“We bring our computers and as long as [a debtor] has not previously tried the License Reinstatement Program with us, we give them a piece of paper and two weeks to show up at court with \$100, and they’re set up with \$100 per month payments.”

Last year 15 people entered the program that way.

“We find personal joy in the Recovery Fair,”Teal added. “When you’re able to say to somebody, ‘Go forth and do good. Here’s your chance. Let’s make it stick.’”

This year the fair will be held Sept. 25, 1 to 6 p.m., at the Parkway Christian Center in Grants Pass.

Teal admitted there is a Catch 22 element to the License Reinstatement Program: If your license is suspended, how can you get to a job to earn money to pay off your fines?

She noted that bus service is one option.

“Granted you may have to come in [from the Illinois Valley] at 6:30 or 7:30 in the morning and your job may not start until 8 or 9. But sometimes if you’re in so deep, you’re going to have to make sacrifices.”

“I can tell you we’ve had guys riding their bikes from Rogue River to make it here to come to treatment,” she added.

But ultimately, what is the bottom line if a debtor without income or assets continues as a scofflaw, including continuing to drive? The answer? In Josephine County, not much.

Josephine County Deputy District Attorney Josh Eastman said that someone with 20 or more tickets in a five-year period will be labeled a habitual offender and continued driving without a license will be treated as a criminal offense. But that presupposes a high rate of being stopped by the police.

And although a conventional insurance agency we checked with said they will not issue auto insurance to someone with a suspended license, an agent with The General Insurance, whose client base is high-risk individuals, confirmed that in Oregon they are able to issue policiesto drivers with a suspended license.

In the end, Teal noted, “Someone’s got to reach out to us to try and figure out what they can do or what can be done to fix things ... There still has to be an effort by the individual.”

SMART ...

Continued from A-1

One opponent of smart meters claimed that a neighborhood of the devices creates a field of radiation hundreds of times stronger than what is safe for human exposure.

Pacific Power denies that smart meters are harmful to human health, and assures the public that their private information is secure. This statement from Pacific Power’s website echoes this stance: “Smart meters transmit energy usage data using low frequency radio waves. These radio waves have been proven to be safe and aren’t associated with any negative health effects, according to the FCC, the Electric Power Research Institute and the World Health Organization.

“In fact, the radio frequency (RF) from smart meters is so low that you could stand directly in front of a smart meter for a full year and still have less RF exposure than you’d get from a single 15-minute cell phone call.”

Both sides - that which supports smart meters and that which opposes them- claim to be backed by science and research, so it is impossible to say for certain which is correct. However, Pacific Power wants to make it clear that they have taken every precaution in their decision to roll out this technology: “Smart

meters have already been installed in 70 million homes across the United States. We’ve intentionally waited until the technology was mature and we were confident that they would exceed all of our safety and security measures.”

If the power company’s assertions fail to assuage you, or you have other reservations about having a smart meter at your home, there is a way to opt out of installation. According to a Pacific Power press release, “Residents could opt out of having a smart meter for a one-time \$137 exchange fee with a \$36 monthly reading fee.” More recent reports alleged that the exchange fee has been dropped, though they could not be verified as of press time. However, it appears that the \$36 per month fee that must be paid to cover the cost of having employees drive out to read your meter is still required. Contact Pacific Power at 1-866-869-8520 to discuss opting out of the smart meter rollout.

It should be noted that smart meters are being installed free of charge. If you decide to allow the upgrade to take place at your home, this is the process that Pacific Power goes about doing so:

1. We will make a reminder call a few days before installation.
2. We will knock on your door to let you know we are on-site. Our authorized installer, Aclara, will arrive between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. Installers will drive vehicles and carry badges that

identify them as an authorized contractor of Pacific Power. Unless your electric meter is inside, they will not need to enter your home.

3. We will perform the installation. This process will cause a less than five-minute power outage. We will remove the old meter, install the new meter, restore service and verify the new meter is functioning properly.
4. We will leave a door hanger to either let you know we successfully installed your new smart meter or provide information on next steps if we were unable to install it.
5. Once your installation is complete, we will manually read your meter for one month to make sure everything is in order. After that, your meter will be read digitally.”

Pacific Power urges customers that receive smart

meters to take several steps prior to installation. These include making sure all members of your household know about the upcoming upgrade, removing any barriers that would restrict installers from reaching your meter (e.g. gates, pets, and debris), and setting up an online account at pacificpower.net to receive alerts and access your billing information and energy usage figures remotely.

For more information about smart meters, visit pacificpower.net/smartmeter or call 1-866-869-8520. For more information about the opposition to smart meters and allegations of health and safety risks they pose, visit smartmeterdangers.org or emfsafetynetwork.org.

WEED ...

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“Those are the people who are doing it the proper way... and they get inspected by the OLCC and the Oregon Health Authority. It’s the people out there that are conducting the illegal diversion of marijuana across our country and across our state that aren’t following the rules, aren’t paying taxes, are involved in this criminal activity ...”

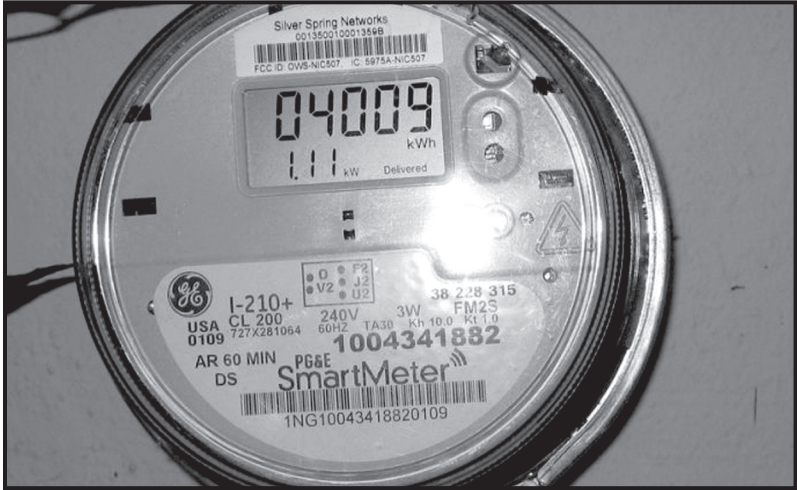
But it can be difficult to distinguish legal grows from illegal grows. Growers can emulate a legal grow and go undetected, and since legalization, local prices are down which creates an incentive for growers to ship product out of state.

According to Daniel, from last year, 37 states have open active investigations regarding the illegal diversion of marijuana from Josephine and Jackson counties.

The funds will also bring some jobs to the area. The new task force will be comprised of four detectives and one deputy district attorney (DA).

“Not only is Josephine County financially supportive of this task force, but is also willing to match this grant with six new positions for the sheriff and DA’s offices,” Daniel writes in the proposal. “The Sheriff’s Office will add three Patrol Deputies and one support staff member. The DA’s Office will add a Deputy DA and a support staff member.”

Daniel and his department will find out if they are to be awarded the grant sometime in October.



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