

# Fee increase would pay for drinking water testing

A \$1.8M bump in state fees

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Under a proposal from state health officials, most public water systems — from small housing developments to bigger cities serving thousands of residents — may have to pay higher monitoring fees to the state.

Officials are asking for a \$1.8 million bump in fees in the state's next two-year budget to cover the costs of monitoring public water systems, an area they say has long been underfunded at a risk to public health and public trust in the safety of drinking water.

"Smaller drinking water systems in Oregon are vulnerable," agency officials wrote in their agency budget request, which was submitted for review by the governor's office and the Legislature, which will hammer out the final budget.

They say that lack of staff and money is "jeopardizing the program's ability to fully meet its mission."

The request follows renewed public interest in the safety of Oregon's drinking water.

This summer, toxic algae at Detroit Lake prevented vulnerable groups, including people with liver conditions, pregnant women and young children, from safely drinking Salem city water.

The state regulates the roughly 900 public water systems that fall between small, private systems with fewer than 10 customers and larger systems subject to more stringent federal Safe Drinking Water Act standards.

The state wants to improve monitoring of systems ranging from the Aching Acres Mobile Home Park in Oregon City, serving six people, to the Big Woods Water District in Roseburg, serving 20.

Together those small systems serve about 15,500 Oregonians, according to state data.

Those state-regulated systems aren't inspected, but they do have to test water samples regularly.

About a fifth of those systems aren't doing that, though, said Jonathan Modie, Oregon Health Authority spokesman.

"The problem with state-regulated systems is that we don't have staff to ade-



Oregon Army National Guard Spc. Joshua White and Andy Smetana, with the Salem Public Works Department, conduct water distribution operations in Salem in June.

quately enforce the regulations when a system stops submitting required monitoring data," Modie wrote in an email. "We also lack the staff to provide technical assistance to systems that need help."

### Quarterly monitoring

State-regulated systems are required to monitor quarterly for coliform bacteria, nitrate annually, and arsenic at least once.

The state receives more than 180,000 lab analyses from water systems every year, and most of those are entered manually into a state database.

That information is compared to safe standards and if a contamination is detected, an email alert is sent to state or county officials to investigate the contamination.

The state also monitors systems subject to federal Safe Drinking Water Act standards, and inspects those every three or five years; those systems would also face fee increases under the health authority's proposal.

The agency wants to charge an annual fee based on the number of connections the water system has, regardless of whether it is subject to regular inspections.

The money from the increased fees would pay for five jobs at the state drinking water program. Local public health authorities who do surveys and respond to contamination alerts would see 25 percent more state money.

Even before the Salem water crisis unfolded in May, the state's health agency has been saying that the drinking water services program

doesn't have enough money. Agency data shows that federal money to supervise public water systems has stagnated since 2014, hovering at about \$1.6 million annually.

David Emme, the health authority's drinking water ser-

vices program manager, said in a January newsletter that the program "has been on a bit of a roller coaster over the last decade."

The program lost a third of its staff since 2009 due to a lack of money, Emme wrote.

"The strain on our staff, managers and county partners is noticeable and we can't continue this erosion," Emme wrote. "While we all recognize the need to prioritize and adapt to limited resources, we also need a sustainable base program."

Bruce Sargent, owner of the Buckhorn Springs Resort in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in southern Oregon, said he doesn't have an issue with what he says is a monthly cost of about \$35 to test the water in the resort's system.

In the months that the resort is open and operating, he sends samples to a testing company, which forwards the samples to the state, Sargent said.

Buckhorn's system, which serves 11 people, is regulated by the state but isn't inspected, according to state data.

Sargent doesn't want to pay an additional fee for water monitoring. Under the proposal, systems like his would have to hand over \$75 to the state every year.

"I don't think they do very

much for us, so if there was a fee, it wouldn't be a good thing from my point of view," Sargent said.

### Better enforcement

The state agency said that the money would step up enforcement of the systems that aren't testing water for health hazards.

The agency has already received some additional money for drinking water issues in the current budget.

Last month, the Legislature's Emergency Board approved an extra \$160,450 for personnel costs in the drinking water services program.

"Colleagues, the issue of contaminants in drinking water in Salem was huge," said state Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem, during the Emergency Board meeting. "I'm sure you've read a lot about it and this will help the agency in order to work on some of those issues."

*The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group, Pamplin Media Group and Salem Reporter.*

# Consult a PROFESSIONAL

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**Q: How does sensitive toothpaste work?**

**A:** Imagine one of your teeth. It has two main sections: the crown above the gum line and the root below. People with sensitive teeth experience pain when their teeth are exposed to something hot, cold or when pressure is applied. The layer of enamel may be thinner and the gum line may have receded, exposing more dentin. Therefore, the recession makes teeth more sensitive. Sensitive toothpaste works by blocking the tubules in the dentine usually contain a chemical called strontium chloride. Repeated use builds up a strong carrier by plugging the tubules more and more, leading to less-sensitive teeth.

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**A:** If you hurt, especially in a joint, use ice; it reduces inflammation and pain and shortens healing time. You can get a burn from ice just like with heat, so don't leave it on for more than 20 minutes. Most problems get better more quickly with ice. Heat feels good, but may seriously make problems worse. As long as there is pain and/or swelling, continue ice; it can be done as often as once an hour. Would you heat a cut? No, because it would keep bleeding —that is what happens inside where you can't see it.



Patrick Webb/Chinook Observer  
John Ramage, project manager, left, and Brett Malin, longtime Seaview resident, are all smiles as they check over the installation of the Seaview sign.

## In Seaview, the sign points to teamwork

By **PATRICK WEBB**  
Chinook Observer

SEAVIEW, Wash. — It's up! The Seaview sign is back in its rightful place, two years after a car accident damaged it so badly it had to be removed.

And Nansen Malin, who led the campaign to get it replaced, is happy.

But she's not taking much of the credit — there is a list of people to thank, proving community projects are a team effort.

The old sign had been in place at 38th Place for 16 years. When it was hit by a vehicle two years ago, Pacific County crews had to remove it because the damaged, termite-ridden structure was a hazard. That version was one of many incarnations greeting visitors to the Seaview beach approach in the past 145 years.

As designs were considered for a new sign, the Columbia Pacific Heritage Museum

showed project supporters photos of earlier versions, some of which were constructed from whale bones or driftwood.

Malin and members of the Seaview Historical Preservation Society decided replacing it was a priority. Getting that accomplished took two years because of the need to raise funds and create a new design that met changed government requirements.

For her project manager, Malin recruited John Ramage, a civil engineer who had retired to Seaview. He embraced the concept, led the planning and provided the technical expertise to make it happen, Malin said.

Together they brought architect David Jensen on board. Jensen, whose grandparents lived close to the sign decades ago, worked through design concepts, engineering requirements and safety regulations. "He helped us refine the design to fit 'Historic Seaview,'" Malin said.

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**A:** Clean out all the diseased plants and remove the weeds. Bait for slugs and add compost and lime. Plant a blended winter cover crop to enrich the soil. Our seed blend has legumes such as vetch and Austrian peas that will fix nitrogen in the soil. In the spring the cover crop gets turned into the soil for a green manure that adds organic matter. During the winter, your garden should be an attractive green oasis instead of an ugly weed patch. Another option is to mulch heavily with straw which will keep weeds out and break down into a nice organic addition to the soil. A quick and easy step that is also inexpensive and chemical-free!

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**A:** Yes. In the State of Oregon a property owner must obtain written consent from the city or county planning commission (or governing body in the absence thereof). The property owned will agree to maintain interment records of who is buried there & provide full disclosure of human remains buried there in the event of property sale. The proposal will be submitted to the State Mortuary & Cemetery Board for approval. All is pursuant to ORS 92.042 and the requirements in their entirety can be found in ORS 97.460.

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