

Oregon could save millions on procurement, audit finds

State should better track purchases

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — State officials could have saved up to \$1.6 billion over a two-year period by being smarter shoppers, according to a state audit released Wednesday.

But, auditors said, old

technology and outdated practices largely prevent the state from digging into whether it is spending each dollar of taxpayer money wisely.

Auditors looked at all information technology purchases in 2016 and 2017 by 10 state agencies whose buying is subject to oversight from the Department of Administrative Services.

They found the state bought 1,300 24-inch Dell monitors for prices ranging

from \$176.40 to \$241.15 and could have saved over \$16,500 by always paying the lowest price.

In another example, the state paid 131 different prices for the same surge protector, ranging from \$65.90 to \$173.98.

While focusing on technology, the auditors used their findings and other research to conclude that Oregon could have trimmed up to 20 percent of \$8 billion in state government purchases in the

2015-17 budget.

The Department of Administrative Services has price agreements with vendors to set prices for goods bought by the state. The state encourages agencies to negotiate for lower prices.

But auditors found that state buyers use multiple systems to track spending and don't follow consistent buying practices.

Some state agencies monitor spending in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets.

Only two state agencies regularly analyze individual purchases, auditors found.

"Without the ability to analyze detailed purchase data for all procurements, Oregon is unable to identify opportunities for potentially millions of dollars in cost savings," auditors wrote.

Oregon could benefit from analyzing information about what it spends money on, auditors found.

Such an analysis can result in big savings. Audi-

tors said that officials in Georgia reported saving \$61 million after doing an analysis of 38 contracts.

Auditors recommended that the Department of Administrative Services buy a procurement system that would provide more details about specific purchases so the state can spot ways to save money.

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration of EO Media Group, Pamplin Media Group and Salem Reporter.

Former Seaside surgeon acquitted of sex abuse charges

Faced 10 counts in six-day trial

By **JACK HEFFERNAN**
The Daily Astorian

A jury acquitted a former Seaside surgeon on Wednesday of sex abuse charges following a six-day trial.

Robert John Gustafson, 49, now of North Dakota, was accused in 2015 of sexually abusing a girl while he lived in Seaside. He faced 10 counts of first-degree sex abuse alleging that, between 2009 and 2011, he repeatedly touched a girl under 14.

Now 18, the young woman testified for five hours during the trial. A video of a 2015 interview with the girl, soon after she disclosed the alleged abuse to her mother, was also played at trial. She asserted that the defendant had touched her inappropriately.

"I didn't know what it was at the time," she said during the 2015 interview. "It was uncomfortable. I didn't like it."

Arguments from Chief Deputy District Attorney Ron Brown included a letter written by the girl around the time of the alleged abuse, the fact that the girl was allegedly cutting herself as a result of the abuse and the manner in which Gustafson allegedly tried to hide the abuse.

In July, Judge Cindee Matyas granted part of a defense motion to exclude evidence regarding Gustafson's past sexual tendencies.

"Most of the time, sexual abuse is committed in secret.

It's committed against children, particularly, because children are easy to manipulate," Brown said to the jury during closing arguments. "The younger the person is, the harder it is for a person to tell, I submit."

Gustafson also testified during the trial. He denied all of the accusations.

"What I was trying to do is figure out how she could have misapprehended that," Gustafson said. "It wasn't until later that all of the, sort of, contradictions and stuff became clear, that there was some amount of deception."

Paul Hood, Gustafson's Portland-based attorney, pointed to a number of minor inconsistencies in witness testimony and the logic of the allegations. He also said that a civil case involving the girl's mother and Gustafson, which was filed soon before the abuse allegations were brought to light, might have been a factor.

"I'm not trying to tell you that any one of these things, by itself, is a slam dunk," Hood said. "Is her testimony so reliable that you can reach that incredibly powerful conclusion? And the answer to that is 'no.'"

Moments after the verdict was read, Hood placed his arm around Gustafson, while the young woman and some of her family members looked down and quietly started to cry.

US miscalculated benefits of oil train brakes

By **MATTHEW BROWN**
Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — The Trump administration miscalculated potential damages from train derailments when it canceled an Obama-era rule requiring the installation of more advanced brakes by railroads hauling explosive fuels, The Associated Press has found.

A government analysis used by the administration to justify the cancellation omitted up to \$117 million in estimated future damages that could be avoided by using electronic brakes. The error could stoke renewed criticism from supporters of the rule who say the analysis was biased.

Department of Transportation officials acknowledged the mistake after it was discovered by the AP during a review of federal documents, but said it does not change their decision not to install the brakes.

Safety advocates, transportation union leaders and Democratic lawmakers oppose the administration's decision to kill the brake rule, which was included in a package of rail safety measures enacted in 2015 under President Barack Obama following dozens of accidents by trains hauling oil and ethanol in the U.S. and Canada.

The deadliest happened in Canada in 2013, when an unattended train carrying crude oil rolled down an incline, came off the tracks in the town of Lac-Mégantic and exploded into a massive

ball of fire, killing 47 people and obliterating much of the Quebec community's downtown. There have been other fiery crashes and fuel spills in Alabama, Oregon, Montana, Virginia, West Virginia, North Dakota and Illinois.

After the brake rule was enacted, lobbyists for the railroad and oil industries pushed to cancel it, citing the high cost of installing so-called electronic pneumatic brakes and questioning their effectiveness.

Unlike other systems where brakes are applied sequentially along the length of a train, electronic pneumatic brakes, or ECP, work on all cars simultaneously. That can reduce the distance and time a train needs to stop, and cause fewer cars to derail.

"These ECP brakes are very important for oil trains," said Steven Ditmeyer, a rail safety expert and former senior official at the Federal Railroad Administration. "It makes a great deal of sense: All the brakes get applied immediately, and there would be fewer cars in the pileup."

Under Obama, the Transportation Department determined the brakes would cost up to \$664 million over 20 years and save between \$470 million and \$1.1 billion from accidents that would be avoided.

The Trump administration reduced the range of benefits to between \$131 million and \$374 million. Transportation department economists said in their analysis that the

change was prompted in part by a reduction in oil train traffic in recent years, which meant there would be fewer derailments.

The transport of crude on U.S. railroads peaked in 2014 when 540,000 tank cars shipped. That fell to about 210,000 carloads last year, most of it from the Bakken oil patch of North Dakota and Montana, according to industry figures.

But in making their calculations, the economists left out the most common type of derailments in which spilled and burning fuel causes property damage but no mass casualties, the AP found. Equipping fuel trains with electronic brakes would reduce damages from those derailments by an estimated

\$48 million to \$117 million, according to Department of Transportation estimates that were left out of the administration's final tally.

Including the omitted benefits reduces the net cost of the requirement to as low as \$63 million under one scenario laid out by the agency.

Transportation spokesman Bobby Fraser said the omission was unintentional and would not have changed September's decision to cancel the electronic brake requirement. Under the administration's analysis, the cost of the brakes would have outweighed the benefits even when considering estimated damages from derailments that were left out of the original findings.



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Words are not enough to Thank the many family and friends who helped celebrate our mom, grandmother and friend, Ann Maize, at her service on Saturday, December 15th. Saying "Goodbye" is never easy, but having so many at our side certainly made it possible. It was a service and reception as beautiful as she was. In addition, we would like to pay special thanks to CALDWELLS-LUCE LAYTON MORTUARY and ERICKSON FLORAL for the professionalism and level of detail they delivered in our mother's service. We will miss her everyday and will remain grateful for those who shared our grief and were there to assist. Thank you, all.
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