

Lawsuits ramp up pressure on opioid company owners

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AP Photo/Jessica Hill

Family and friends who have lost loved ones to OxyContin and opioid overdoses leave pill bottles in protest outside the headquarters of Purdue Pharma in Stamford, Conn.

The legal pressure on the prominent family behind the company that makes OxyContin, the prescription painkiller that helped fuel the nation's opioid epidemic, is likely to get more intense.

The Sackler family came under heavy scrutiny this week when a legal filing in a Massachusetts case gave detailed allegations that they and company executives sought to push prescriptions of the drug and downplay its risks. Those revelations are likely to be a preview of the claims in a series of expanding legal challenges.

Members of the family that controls Connecticut-based Purdue Pharma already are defendants in a lawsuit brought by New York's Suffolk County.

Paul Hanly, a lawyer representing the county, said he expects to add the Sacklers to other opioid suits filed across the country. He explained last year that he was targeting the

family, known for its donations to some of the world's great museums and universities, in part because they took "tens of billions" of dollars out of Purdue.

Looming as potentially the biggest legal and financial risk for the family is a massive consolidated federal case playing out in Ohio.

More than 1,000 government entities have sued Purdue, along with other drugmakers and distributors, claiming they are partly culpable for a drug

overdose crisis that resulted in a record 72,000 deaths in 2017. The majority of those deaths were from legal or illicit opioids.

The company documents at the heart of the Massachusetts claims also could be evidence in the Ohio lawsuits, which are being overseen by a federal judge. The allegations ramp up pressure on the industry — and perhaps the Sacklers — to reach a settlement, said Paul Nolette, a political science professor at Marquette University

who studies the role of state attorneys general.

Having Sackler family members named as defendants in Massachusetts "indicates that the government attorneys believe they have the 'smoking guns' necessary to broaden the potential liability of those at the top of the organization," he said in an email.

The allegations could tarnish a name that is best known for its generosity to museums worldwide including New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, which has a Sackler wing, and London's Tate Modern. The Sackler name also is on a gallery at the Smithsonian, a wing of galleries at London's Royal Academy of Arts and a museum at Beijing's Peking University. The family's best known and most generous donor, Arthur M. Sackler, died nearly a decade before OxyContin was released.

The Cleveland-based judge, Dan Polster, has been pushing for a settlement since he took over the federal cases a year ago, arguing that the parties involved

should find ways to end this man-made crisis, rather than hold years of trials. A court order prohibits participants from discussing most aspects of settlement talks publicly.

In its lawsuit filed last year, the Massachusetts attorney general's office went after members of the Sackler family and Purdue, which is structured as a partnership and is not publicly traded.

The company's flagship drug, OxyContin, was the first of a generation of drugs that used a narcotic painkiller in a time-release form. That meant each pill had a larger amount of drug in it than other versions and could get abusers a more intense high if they defeated the time-release process.

Many of the attorney general's specific allegations — based on company documents — were blacked out at the request of Purdue and the Sackler family. The state recently filed a new version of its complaint that made public many of their allegations for the first time.

Tourism: 'Lots of people don't see tourism as a part of our local economy'

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beaches from misuse and overpopulation.

One team is set to create and share more photos of less-visited places to reduce pressure on popular destinations like Ecola and Fort Stevens state parks.

Another will invest more in communication about good stewardship, starting with an inventory of what is happening already.

"If we're going to encourage people to recycle, we have to make sure there's enough recycling containers," said Claudine Rehn, of the Tillamook Estuary Partnership.

One team, led by Teri Wing, of Oregon State Parks, plans to create a Beach Trail Ambassador program that will help educate visitors about proper trail etiquette and safety.

"If someone is going up Falcon Cove and they have flip-flops on, they'll turn them around and say, 'It's not good to wear flip-flops on this trail,'" Wing said. "The idea is to get them good info to make them safe as well as give them information about the area."

Transportation was also a focus, with some aiming to educate hotel staff on public and alternative transportation options so more visitors are aware of how to get around without a car. The group, headed by Ken Shonkwiler, of the Oregon Department of Transportation, also plans to develop better wayfinding signs so people know where to park and get around once they get here.

The right message

Participants also decided it was important to educate and impress upon local residents how important tourism is to the region's economy.

Pamela Wey, a Clatsop County commissioner and leader of the group charged with championing the value of tourism, said it's important to address the distaste some residents have about the industry.

"Lots of people don't see tourism as a part of our local economy," she said.

With tourism spending at almost \$2 billion on the Oregon Coast alone, Wey said it will take everyone embracing the industry to make sure it grows and is managed in the right way.

"That's money spent by people from outside," she said. "As an economic development person, I can tell you there's nothing better for a community than people spending money that was earned somewhere else, because it really enhances your economic base. We need to help our citizens understand this reality."

Transit: Funding for mass transit more than \$16B this fiscal year

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Hazen is now exploring cutbacks to less-used routes such as the Lower Columbia Connector, along with weekend service, hours of operation and employee hours. While employees could see their hours cut, he doesn't foresee any layoffs.

Federal funding for mass transit was more than \$16 billion this fiscal year, most of it through the Federal Transit Administration. The grants from the agency help fund rural to large urban transit networks.

"Nobody has stopped any service," Paul Skoutelas, president and CEO of the American Public Trans-

portation Association, told municipal finance publication The Bond Buyer. "I think that's a last resort for these agencies. But everyone is beginning to feel the difficulties of trying to meet payments to vendors, normal kinds of operating expenses. In some cases just moving projects forward for project approvals."

For John Coy, who doesn't have a driver's license and regularly takes Route 101 between Astoria and Seaside, the bus means getting to work and to see his parole officer.

"That would suck," he said of potential cutbacks. "It would be a lot of walking, a lot of walking."



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Steve Weinert waits for passengers to arrive at the Astoria Transit Center.

Salmon: Both sides argue about the effectiveness of gillnets

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former Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber — to phase gillnets off the main stem.

Under the plan, gillnetters were directed to off-channel fishing areas, including Youngs Bay. These areas cannot support the fleet, commercial fishermen argue. But conservationists say the change was necessary to protect wild salmon runs.

Both sides argue about the effectiveness of gillnets — nets that hang vertically in the water and catch fish by the gills — to catch targeted fish and avoid threatened or endangered fish.

A majority on Oregon's commission has been open to allowing gillnetters some time back on the main stem. Recent assessments by fish and wildlife staff on both sides of the river concluded neither recreational nor commercial fishermen have seen the expected economic benefits under the plan, nor have other gear options done a better job at protecting salmon. Washington has continued to explore gear alternatives and has not been as interested in putting gillnets back on the river.

Immediate issues

The joint committee that

met Thursday discussed immediate issues with this year's river policies. They plan to begin developing recommendations ahead of the regular season-setting process in March.

Right now, there are catch allocation differences for the fall Chinook run and — a big sticking point — differences in gear Oregon allows during the spring Chinook season.

Oregon allows the use of commercial tangle nets if run sizes hold and not too many wild fish have been handled in the early part of the spring season.

Washington does not allow any main stem commercial fishing of spring Chinook, and Washington Commissioner David Graybill argued against any change to that policy. He also questioned Oregon's policy.

Oregon Commissioners Holly Akenson and Bruce Buckmaster hoped discussions of this year's fisheries could act as a way to address overall changes to the Kitzhaber Plan.

They argued the states need to hit pause on the plan, reassess and figure out new ways to meet the plan's goals of conservation, orderly fisheries and enhanced economic oppor-



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Oregon and Washington state are discussing how to deal with gillnets on the Columbia River.

tunities. The original plan, as executed, appears to have failed, Buckmaster maintained.

Washington Commissioners Bob Kehoe and Don McIsaac were not opposed to this approach, especially where the economics of the fisheries are concerned, but McIsaac emphasized the need to address the 2019 season.

"We are in crisis with these runs," Graybill protested. "We need to take care of these fish first of all."

"We cannot go backwards," he said.

Early forecasts predict low returns of spring Chinook. Last year and this winter, adult salmon and

steelhead returns to the river came in below predictions, leading to fishing closures throughout the region.

Liz Hamilton, director of the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association and a longtime proponent of the Kitzhaber Plan, agreed with Graybill. She listened to the committee meeting from a seat in the audience.

"I think this is going in the wrong direction and I think it's very misguided," she said afterward. "In light of the condition of the runs, the condition of orcas, the optics of growing gillnets in the Columbia River is not going to play well in the public. It's not going to play well in the Legislature."

"We're already hearing

from legislators that they're really tired of hearing this issue hacked out again and again and again."

New bill

A bill introduced Monday in the Oregon Legislature would take a more definitive step against the use of gillnets and tangle nets in the state's commercial fisheries. Senate Bill 547, sponsored by state Sen. Chuck Riley, D-Hillsboro, calls for an outright ban of the gear except in tribal fisheries.

The bill has been referred to the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee and has yet to gain any other sponsors.

Jim Wells, president of the gillnet advocacy group Salmon For All, sat several rows in front of Hamilton at the meeting Thursday. He saw the committee's discussion as a positive step, especially with a number of commissioners clearly advocating for another look at the Kitzhaber Plan. He says gillnetters have only seen their economic opportunities decline since the plan began to phase them off the river.

The committee will meet again in early February to keep talking about options for this year's fisheries and the long term.

Moon: Astronomers are interested in color, intensity of the light

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Here's what to look for:

The Great Solar Eclipse of 2017 added the words penumbra and umbra to our vocabulary. As a refresher, the penumbra is the portion of shadow cast before the partial phase begins. It is nearly imperceptible, but by 7:10 p.m. some dimming may be seen. The moon begins to enter the umbra at 7:34 as the partial phase begins. A little more than an hour later the earth's umbral shadow will completely immerse the moon. Totality

will last another hour before the process is reversed, and the moon begins to return to its normal brilliance. The entire show ends at 11:50 p.m. when the moon leaves the penumbra.

That blood moon

Amateur and professional astronomers are not looking for blood on the moon, but are nevertheless interested in the color and intensity of the light that makes its way around the Earth to illuminate the lunar disc, and it can be of more than a passing interest

to the casual observer. The appearance of a full lunar eclipse gives us a glimpse into the condition of the atmosphere surrounding our planet. The only reason we can see the moon at all during an eclipse is because sunlight is refracted and scattered by the Earth's atmosphere. An astronaut on the moon would see Earth surrounded by a thin, red ring of sunlight, shining through the atmosphere. He would be observing every sunrise and sunset on Earth happening simultaneously.

When the atmosphere is

full of clouds and volcanic dust, little light falls on the moon and it will appear very dark, or disappear nearly completely, as in 1963, 1982 and '91. Multiple volcanic eruptions during those years dimmed the eclipse. Atmospheric pollutants, while not blocking sunlight, can make for a brilliant, red appearance.

Stars and more stars

Keep an eye on the surrounding night sky before and during the eclipse. Full moonlight in January is pervasive and obscures

the night sky better than all of our man-made light pollution. But we just might make out Castor and Pollux, the Gemini Twins, just above the moon. Bright Procyon lies below and to the right, but nearly drowned out by moonlight. The constellation Orion and its retinue of brilliant stars lies to the west, barely visible. Totality changes all that.

It's time to grab the binoculars because when the moon slips away, the stars come out to play. The January night sky is glorious

on a moonless night. Orion dominates above the southern horizon. Train the binoculars on the three belt stars and scan below them to the Orion nebula. Scan below the dimmed moon to find the Beehive, a delightful cluster of tiny star points. No need to hurry; the sky will remain dark for a little more than an hour. And then the moon will slowly return to its full glory.

The next total lunar eclipse visible in its entirety from the Pacific Northwest will occur on May 26, 2021.