

Coast Guard will get paid as shutdown ends, for now

Operations are getting back to normal

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

The Coast Guard started getting back to normal on Monday after the longest government shutdown in U.S. history was temporarily halted.

Community groups are hopeful but bracing in case Congress and President Donald Trump cannot reach a compromise on border security by Feb. 15, when another disruption is possible.

Chief Petty Officer David Mosley, a spokesman for District 13 in Seattle overseeing Sector Columbia River, said about 3,500 enlisted Coast Guard personnel in the region had been working without pay since Jan. 15, along with more than 150 civilian employees furloughed. That included more than 500 enlisted Coast Guard and 14 furloughed civilian employees in the sector.

During the partial shutdown, the Coast Guard stopped doing "things that were considered nonessential," Mosley said. "If it needed a new coat of paint, it didn't get it."

That included regular buoy maintenance by the Aids to Navigation Team Astoria on Tongue Point, except in the case of emergencies. Training was also curtailed, and the winter version of the Coast Guard's semiannual Advanced Helicopter Rescue School was canceled.

The Coast Guard is expected to receive back pay by Thursday, along with paychecks on Friday and Feb. 15 while government funding lasts. There is no contingency in place if the shutdown restarts.

An estimated 9,600 federal employees in Oregon were furloughed or working without pay during the shutdown. Another federal agency with a major presence on the lower Columbia River is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which oversees fisheries, weather and other biological functions.

"NOAA continued to provide essential services during the lapse in funding thanks to the dedication of its workforce," Michael Milstein, a regional spokesman for NOAA, said in an email. "NOAA is currently assessing how the lapse in funding may have affected operations. As that information becomes available, we will share but we do not have further announcements to make at this time."

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden joined 28 others in the Senate who wrote a letter calling on the Trump administration to provide back pay to the more than 800,000 federal workers affected by the shutdown as soon as possible, regardless of pay schedules.

"This government shutdown made it clearer than ever just how dedicated civil servants are to their jobs, and how vital those jobs are to the nation," the senators wrote. "We ask that you publicize when exactly these civil servants can expect to receive their back pay, and we hope it will arrive very soon."

During the shutdown, the community stepped up to help unpaid federal workers. Be the Light food pantry, organized by Stacey Benson and a small army of local volunteers, provided groceries and daily living needs to more than 2,300 people over two weekends.

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Stanley Custer waits for the Astoria Warming Center to open.

Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

FOR THE ASTORIA WARMING CENTER, A 'GROWING UP PROCESS'



ABOVE: Gregor Ledferd prepares food at the Astoria Warming Center. BELOW: The warming center in Astoria prior to opening for the night.



Emergency shelter now in a better place

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

The Astoria Warming Center, one of the few local options for homeless people seeking emergency shelter on cold winter nights, is in a very different place than it was last year.

Changes and policies drafted in response to neighborhood complaints feel more routine, and the warming center's leaders have started to turn their gaze both outward and inward in a new way.

A midseason neighborhood meeting scheduled for Saturday will provide feedback from the community about operations this winter. Board members are confident they have kept promises they made when they first went through a lengthy and sometimes contentious process to get a conditional use permit from the city in 2017.

The permit, which must be renewed each year, included formal commitments to the neighborhood and allowed the warming center to continue operating out of the basement of First United Methodist Church on 11th Street.

"I kind of see it as a 'growing up' process," said Janet Miltenberger, treasurer for the warming center's board.

Board members have started to formalize how they operate this season. They are working on a management plan and a longer-term vision. More local businesses and restaurants are donating and providing food. Volunteer recruitment and fundraising efforts have become a central focus.

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New smart meters track power usage

Some people are alarmed

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Pacific Power will start rolling out new smart meters in Clatsop County in February that track power usage by the hour.

The project is part of a \$117 million investment by the private utility in 590,000 smart meters across Oregon, including 24,000 in the county. The installations will begin on the north side of the county and move south, with completion expected between the end of April and early May.

The smart meters have a communications module that uploads

power usage data via a secure wireless mesh network to Pacific Power's servers. About six weeks after installation, customers will be able to look at their hourly power usage on a secure website.

"From other customers with smart meters, they have better insight into their energy use," said Alisa Dunlap, a regional business manager with Pacific Power in northwest Oregon. "They can take a look when things are spiking, which internal issue might be occurring."

"Right now, customers have to call us when the power is out," she said. "These meters will automatically notify us, so outages should be shorter."

Cory Estlund, Pacific Power's

manager of field support, said there are about 70 million smart meters across the U.S. More than two-thirds of Oregon homes and businesses have them. The utility waited several years to allow the technology to be refined and come down in price before investing.

"The difference is they have a communication module that lets us handle data," Estlund said. "Now we can do things remotely without having to roll out a truck and look at a meter."

The change to online meter-reading will cut 100 positions from Pacific Power's statewide workforce of 5,500, including six in Clatsop

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Pacific Power

Pacific Power's new smart meters include a communications module that sends hourly power usage data to the utility's servers. The data will be available to customers online.

