

Outbreak: Company has had five outbreaks across four locations

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members that tracking how a workplace outbreak originated and spread can be difficult. The agency organized the town hall after U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, an Oregon Democrat, expressed concerns that the community lacked information about the outbreak.

"Outbreaks like this are complicated," Allen said. "They can involve things like social events, people who have contact with other members of their household as well as employment. So, all of these things can work together to cause the number of cases to build up. It's not so simple to point to just a particular event or a particular place and say that was the cause of the outbreak."

Oregon OSHA's response

Brandie Hogg, director of team member services at Pacific Seafood, said the company has implemented stringent safety measures at their facilities since the start of the pandemic and has asked employees to adhere to similar safety measures at home and at off-site housing.

Additionally, she said the company ensured that no more than two workers were assigned to any given room at off-site hotels. She said the company also took steps to ensure there was additional spacing and mandatory mask wearing in private transportation that Pacific Seafood provided to bring employees to work.

Since the outbreak, Pacific Seafood has worked with the Oregon Health Authority to have staff on-site at the hotel to ensure that quarantine requirements are followed and help deliver food and supplies to workers.

"We really care about our team members and this community that we've been a part of since 1983," Hogg said. "We have always ral-

lied around our team in tough times. ... During this pandemic, we continue that promise to do everything we can to support our team and the community, keeping each other safe."

But Oregon's Occupational Safety and Health division, which is tasked with enforcing the state's workplace safety and health rules, has never conducted a formal enforceable inspection at Pacific Seafood's facilities to ensure that pandemic-related safety measures are being followed as reported. At least 317 cases have been linked to the company from five outbreaks across four locations.

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Oregon is in the process of adopting new temporary rules to beef up workplace standards in an attempt to stop the spread of the virus. And the state already initiated an emphasis program for the food processing industry after a spate of outbreaks early in the pandemic, allowing more resources to be put toward proactively inspecting food processors. OSHA has also responded to workplace inspection requests from the Oregon Health Authority.

only has the resources to inspect 2.5% of workplaces.

"The threshold that it would take to get an inspection initiated in normal times would probably be lower," Wood said. "But as we make those decisions, we have to consider the rest of the workload and the complaint volume, including sites where we've had multiple complaints from workers about exposures and we haven't necessarily inspected yet."

Outbreaks at Pacific Seafood

That state's response doesn't change, even if a company has been linked to multiple outbreaks.

anonymous complaint claimed that Pacific Seafood workers were being required to return to work in May after testing positive for COVID-19. OSHA couldn't reach the complainant and resolved the complaint after being told by Pacific Seafood and local health authorities that no employees were being told to come to work after testing positive.

Pacific Seafood's safety plan requires workers to quarantine after testing positive for COVID-19, but allows for close contacts who test negative and aren't exhibiting symptoms to return to work immediately.

According to The Astorian, the Oregon Health Authority took over contact tracing among Pacific Seafood workers after the dispute and took the lead following the outbreak at the Warrenton facility in September.

A spokesman for the Oregon Health Authority said the agency stepped in to provide assistance at the request of the county following the September outbreak, but The Astorian reported that Clatsop County wants to be the lead agency responding to any future coronavirus outbreaks at Pacific Seafood in Warrenton.

Following the September outbreak, Pacific Seafood had both workers who tested positive and their close contacts quarantine, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

The September outbreak in Warrenton led Gov. Kate Brown to put Clatsop County on the state's coronavirus watch list. It also prompted the Warrenton-Hammond School District to close schools for in-person instruction.

Pacific Seafood voluntarily suspended all operations on Sept. 24 after the extent of the outbreak became clear. The company began reopening on Sept. 30, bringing back a group of workers who had tested negative and had not been deemed close contacts. An additional group of workers who had previously tested positive but had completed their quarantine periods and been symptom-free for three days were brought back to work earlier in October.

"We are quickly approaching the end of our first testing group's quarantine periods and will continue to work with the Oregon Health Authority to create a plan to safely return them back to work in a phased reopening of our operation," Hogg said.

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Patrick Allen | the director of the Oregon Health Authority

OSHA also doesn't have the jurisdiction to inspect the off-site housing facilities where Pacific Seafood workers stay. The agency adopted a temporary rule in June at the urging of worker advocates meant to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 within employer-provided housing. It has since inspected just three labor housing facilities, issuing one citation. But the labor housing must be employer-owned and operated to fall under OSHA's jurisdiction.

"This is a lodging facility that the employer has arranged to house people at," said OSHA Administrator Michael Wood. "That's dif-

ferent from employer-provided and operated labor housing. The only jurisdiction we would have over the hotel would be in regard to the employees of the hotel."

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Wood said that OSHA does not initiate an inspection solely in response to an outbreak because the state doesn't want to deter employers from testing workers. The state has not required mandatory coronavirus testing for food processing workers, something workers advocates and Clatsop County have sought.

OSHA has received seven complaints since March relating to Pacific Seafood facilities, four of which had to do with processing operations.

The only complaint related to the Warrenton facility was resolved without an inspection. The

That appears to have become a point of contention between Pacific Seafood and Clatsop County after a worker from Moldova tested positive upon arrival in Warrenton in June, according to emails reviewed by The Oregonian. County officials wanted close contacts who traveled with the worker to quarantine but Pacific Seafood pointed to the state's investigative guidelines, which allow for asymptomatic exposed workers in essential industries to return to work during the quarantine period if accommodations are made to prevent possible exposure to other staff.

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