

State inspections lagged before workplace outbreaks

By **ROB DAVIS** and **JAMIE GOLDBERG**
The Oregonian

The complaints to Oregon workplace safety officials alleged that workers were facing life-threatening risks before the coronavirus took hold and rapidly moved through factories, stores and plants across the state.

On the Oregon Coast, one complaint said, nearly a dozen workers tested positive for coronavirus but were still required to report to work.

In southern Oregon, another said, workers who stood a foot apart on a production line were told to “deal with it.”

And in the Portland metro area, an allegation said, workers with coronavirus symptoms were threatened with discipline if they tried to stay home.

The Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration didn’t inspect any of the workplaces in response.

Each business later suffered outbreaks, leaving a combined 250 workers and their closest contacts infected or presumed to be infected with the coronavirus.

It’s impossible to know whether an inspection prompted by workers’ complaints would have prevented those outbreaks, or if inspections conducted elsewhere by the state successfully kept workers from getting sick.

But among the 35 largest workplace outbreaks in Oregon, state officials received warnings before 23, an analysis of state data by The Oregonian found. Yet state officials inspected only two of those businesses before an outbreak, finding no violations.

“It’s a disgrace,” said Reyna Lopez, director of Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, Oregon’s largest farmworker union. “They’ve failed us. The message it sends to people is you’re on your own.”

“I would think the one agency that is supposed to be protecting workers would step up during a pandemic,” she added, “and it hasn’t.”

Over 11,000 complaints

Since March, Oregon OSHA has received more than 11,000 complaints about COVID safety risks and potential violations of Gov. Kate Brown’s public health orders. The workplace safety agency, with 76 compliance officers and a \$13.5 million enforcement budget, has relied on a massive phone and letter-writing campaign to ensure compliance.

It’s an unprecedented response for an administration that has gotten about six times more complaints than normal. But because the effort has relied on taking workplaces at their word, with few unannounced inspections, worker advocates say it has been ineffective, giving the state watchdog no real way to verify whether workplaces are actually complying.

Michael Wood, the agency’s administrator, said few inspections happened in March and April amid an early rush of complaints because of concerns that inspectors without symptoms might be carriers for the novel coronavirus. In May and June, he said, his agency prioritized inspections where they could be outside or conduct interviews outside.

The agency also conducted hundreds of spot checks, he said, to see whether businesses were complying with the governor’s shutdown orders. Half of the complaints have been resolved; another 5,000 are still being processed.

“Overall, I feel good about how we’ve responded,” Wood said. “That’s not the same thing as saying we did it perfectly or that there aren’t things I would change with the ability to look back at them.”

The agency will not initiate an inspection solely based on an outbreak because they don’t want to deter employers from testing workers, Wood said. However, if the agency receives a referral from the Oregon Health Authority or local public health authorities following an outbreak, they are likely to make an inspection a priority. The health authority refused to say how often that’s happened.

In all, Oregon OSHA had conducted 237 inspections related to COVID-19 as of Nov. 3. That’s about one a day.

It had issued 50 citations and fines totaling \$114,000 as of the same date. Those include \$23,000 in fines against a Salem cafe and Lakeview pharmacy the state said failed to

require physical distancing and ensure that customers and employees wore masks, ignoring repeated warnings.

Oregon’s workplaces have exacerbated the statewide spread of the coronavirus: an estimated 9,967 people have contracted the virus that way, nearly a sixth of all cases in the state. Fifty-three people have died from workplace outbreaks, many of them in prisons, though the Oregon Health Authority refuses to say where the deaths occurred.

The Oregonian’s analysis, which revealed the lack of inspections at businesses with outbreaks, was only possible because Oregon discloses the name of any business linked to five or more coronavirus cases and with at least 30 workers. The state began releasing workplace information only after media reports about a second large outbreak this spring tied to Townsend Farms, prompting officials to acknowledge the need for a “transparent statewide approach.”

Dozens of prison complaints, no inspections

The coronavirus moved swiftly through Oregon’s prisons, leaving 17 inmates dead and 1,300 infected, along with more than 300 state workers positive.

Oregon OSHA has received dozens of complaints about the conditions in prisons, which are responsible for five of the state’s 10 worst outbreaks, excluding long-term care facilities.

It hasn’t inspected any. “The virus is not incarcerated,” said Alice Lundell, a spokeswoman for the Oregon Justice Resource Center, which has lobbied for a large-scale release of inmates to allow for social distancing behind bars. “We’d welcome OSHA taking action to investigate and inspect to make sure everything possible is being done to prevent the spread of disease.”

Wood said it’s harder to inspect a prison and get an unvarnished view of what’s happening inside because there’s no element of surprise.

“In retrospect, do I wish we had gone into a couple of those prisons? Yes,” Wood said. “I agree there’s a red flag that we missed or ideally that I would have liked to have responded to differently.”

Oregon’s other hardest-hit job sites are farms and food processing facilities, where more than 50 coronavirus outbreaks have left upward of 1,500 workers and close contacts infected or suspected of being infected, according to an analysis by The Oregonian.

The state’s efforts to protect those high-risk workers has frustrated Jenny Pool Radway, executive director at Consejo Hispano, a nonprofit based in Astoria that supports Latino workers.

Pool Radway’s organization filed a complaint on behalf of workers April 18, alleging that Bornstein Seafoods in Astoria was not providing personal protective equipment or enforcing social distancing rules. Oregon OSHA followed up with Bornstein Seafoods two days later in an email.

Two dozen workers at Bornstein tested positive for COVID-19 a few weeks later, forcing the company to temporarily shut down operations.

Even after the outbreak, Oregon OSHA did not conduct a formal inspection, finding the company’s emailed response satisfactory.

Bornstein Seafoods, which didn’t respond to questions from The Oregonian, told Oregon OSHA the company had implemented social distancing requirements, distributed masks, regularly sanitized the facility and provided information about COVID-19 to employees before the outbreak, state records show. Roxann Forkan, the company’s occupational health and safety manager, also told Oregon OSHA the company had invited local public health officials to visit the facility and recommend best safety practices.

Pool Radway said she was under the impression the complaint her organization filed would have prompted an inspection from Oregon OSHA.

But that didn’t happen at Bornstein Seafoods, nor in response to multiple COVID-19 safety complaints against Pacific Seafood or frozen potato processor Lamb Weston, which reported a combined 677 coronavirus cases across eight work sites and are responsible for two of the five-worst workplace outbreaks in the state.

OBITUARIES

Robert John Sunell Williamsburg, Virginia June 5, 1929 — Aug. 8, 2020



Retired Maj. Gen. Robert (Bob) John Sunell passed away on Aug. 8, 2020.

He was born on June 5, 1929, in Astoria, Oregon, the son of Ernest and Grace Sunell. Bob graduated from Astoria High School in 1948, and attended the University of Oregon.

He married JoAnn Toika of Astoria in 1951, and they had three children. He joined the National Guard following high school, and transitioned to the regular U.S. Army after college.

His Army career spanned more than 33 years of active service and 32 moves, including overseas tours of duty in the Korean and Vietnam wars, and numerous tours in Germany, where he also served as an exchange officer with the Royal Tank Regiment of the British Army.

He graduated from the Army War College in 1973. He held multiple positions that significantly impacted the development of the Army’s armored force. Bob’s peers have referred to him as the father of the modern tank.

Bob assumed command of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (Blackhorse Regiment) in Fulda, Germany, in 1978. He was promoted to brigadier general while in command of the 11th Cavalry, the only general to command the regiment. Colleagues have commented that this assignment was the one he was the proudest of, and meant the most to him.

Bob was promoted to major general as project manager of the M1 Abrams Tank in Michigan. There he conceived the idea for a family of armored vehicles to replace the armored force as it became obsolete.

Upon retirement in 1987, Bob, with his wife, JoAnn, formed a consulting firm which worked closely with U.S. and allied militaries to improve international cooperation through common equipment and methods.

Bob was also a contract professional

for several companies involved in training simulation, robotics, artificial intelligence and armaments for future combat vehicles.

Bob was an innovative thinker and leader. He received numerous honors throughout his life. He was decorated with the Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, Legion of Merit (twice), Bronze Star, Air Medal (twice), Meritorious Service Award and the Army Commendation Medal, among many others.

He was a member of the Saab-sponsored Swedish Science Council, U.S. Army Association, Calvary and Armor Association and Blackhorse Association.

Bob loved the Army, but enjoyed his retirement in Queen’s Lake, Virginia, and later Patriots Colony, Virginia (both near Williamsburg). He was proud of his Finnish heritage, and was instrumental in maintaining family ties with relatives in Finland.

He was an avid reader, golfer, fisherman, hunter, gardener and sauna enthusiast.

Bob was devoted to his wife, JoAnn, and their children. He was blessed with an abundance of close friendships. He cherished the time spent with his daughters, their husbands and grandchildren.

Bob is survived by his daughters, Perry Peterson (Art) and Dr. Patti Johnson (David); his grandchildren, Jake Sunell Sigl (Geonni), Molly Peterson, Andrea Peterson and Stacy Sunell; and his great-grandson, Parker Eugene McGirr.

He was preceded in death by his wife, JoAnn, and his son, Robert P. Sunell.

An interment with full military honors will take place at Arlington National Cemetery on March 29, 2021.

Memorial contributions may be made to: The Blackhorse Association, Attn: Treasurer, Daniel M. Caughey, CPA, P.O. Box 1712, Mill Valley, CA., 94942

The full obituary and condolences may be viewed at nelsenwilliamsburg.com



Robert Sunell

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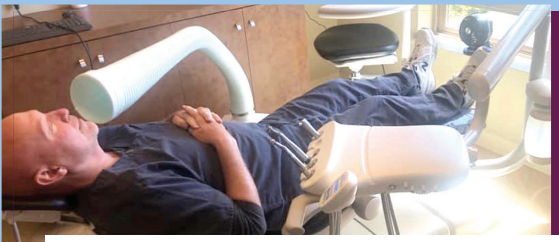


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Diane G.

I saw the highest standard of health safety practices in effect during my hygienist appointment today—much higher precautions than I’d seen in a local hospital when having tests last month. The new sanitation equipment and attention to patient safety at Klemp Family Dentistry is in keeping with a dental practice I consider cutting edge with respect to all my dental needs. It’s wonderful having a world class dental practice here at the coast, one where I can have procedures performed for which I used to have to travel to a specialist in Portland. I have been a patient of several local dentists in the past, but none had the skill and, more importantly, the attention to patient comfort that Dr Klemp provides.

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SEVEN-DAY FORECAST FOR ASTORIA

TODAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
50 38	54 42	50 35	49 36	50 36	50 35	50 36
A shower in the a.m.	Partly sunny	Rain in the morning	Mostly sunny	Rain possible	Partly sunny	Plenty of sun

ALMANAC

Astoria through Thursday

Temperatures

High/low	50/41
Normal high/low	51/38
Record high	62 in 2017
Record low	24 in 1896

Precipitation

Thursday	0.05"
Month to date	9.59"
Normal month to date	9.56"
Year to date	55.98"
Normal year to date	56.03"

Forecasts and graphics provided by
AccuWeather, Inc. ©2020

UNDER THE SKY

Tonight’s Sky: Due east, The Hyades, form a V that outlines the Taurus bull’s face and Pleiades cluster.

Source: Jim Todd, OMSI

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	7:34 a.m.
Sunset tonight	4:33 p.m.
Moonrise today	3:54 p.m.
Moonset today	5:44 a.m.

Full	Last	New	First
Nov 30	Dec 7	Dec 14	Dec 21

TODAY’S TIDES

Astoria / Port Docks	Time	High (ft.)	Time	Low (ft.)
11:32 a.m.	8.6	5:34 a.m.	2.6	none
6:31 p.m.	0.9	Cape Disappointment	4:53 a.m.	2.9
11:08 a.m.	8.4	5:41 p.m.	0.1	none
Hammond	11:16 a.m.	8.8	5:07 a.m.	2.8
none	6:00 p.m.	0.0	Warrenton	11:27 a.m.
8.9	5:18 a.m.	2.7	none	6:15 p.m.
0.0	Knapapa	12:35 a.m.	7.2	6:35 a.m.
2.2	12:09 p.m.	8.8	7:32 p.m.	0.0
Depoe Bay	10:22 a.m.	8.8	4:18 a.m.	3.2
11:39 p.m.	7.1	5:13 p.m.	0.3	

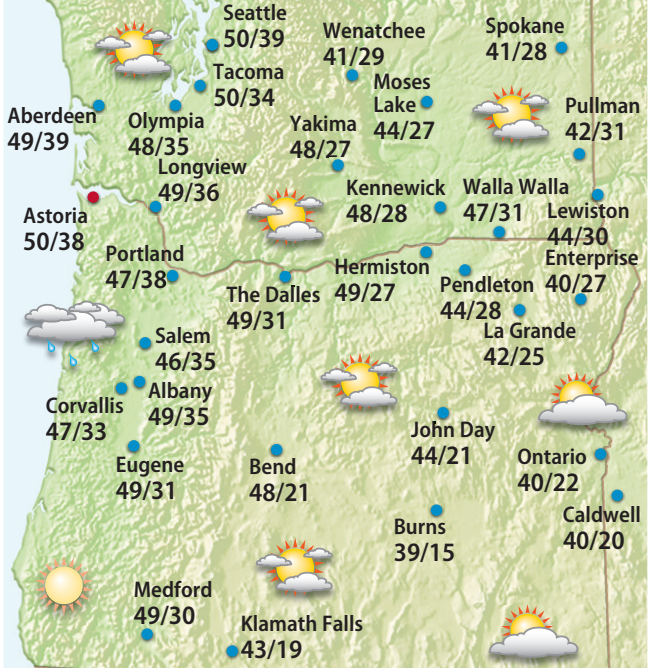
NATIONAL CITIES

City	Today	Sun.
	Hi/Lo/W	Hi/Lo/W
Atlanta	68/49/pc	60/44/r
Boston	53/37/s	50/40/s
Chicago	50/36/s	48/30/pc
Dallas	52/41/t	54/34/pc
Denver	56/26/s	42/23/s
Honolulu	83/72/pc	83/71/s
Houston	66/52/r	60/43/pc
Los Angeles	72/47/s	72/49/s
Miami	81/70/pc	82/71/pc
New York City	56/40/s	52/47/s
Phoenix	71/46/s	74/53/s
San Francisco	62/43/s	61/43/s
Wash., DC	59/38/pc	56/47/pc
Weather (W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, l-ice.		

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REGIONAL FORECAST

Shown is today’s weather. Temperatures are today’s highs and tonight’s lows.



City	Today	Sun.	City	Today	Sun.
	Hi/Lo/W	Hi/Lo/W		Hi/Lo/W	Hi/Lo/W
Baker City	42/20/pc	40/25/pc	North Bend	55/37/pc	55/44/pc
Brookings	54/39/pc	54/46/pc	Roseburg	51/31/pc	50/36/pc
Ilwaco	50/38/pc	52/43/pc	Seaside	50/37/pc	52/41/pc
Newberg	49/35/c	48/37/pc	Springfield	51/34/c	49/36/pc
Newport	52/39/c	53/43/pc	Vancouver	48/35/c	49/37/c