

IN BRIEF

Vaccination events canceled over delivery disruption

The Clatsop County vaccine task force canceled three coronavirus vaccination events this week due to a disruption in the delivery of vaccine doses.

About 1,100 people were expected to receive their first or second doses at three events on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in Astoria and Seaside.

The county said everyone has been contacted about rescheduling for future vaccination events.

People who were scheduled to receive second vaccine doses at one of this week's canceled events will be able to secure spots in one of the events next week.

As of Monday, 6,019 doses have been administered.

ICE places immigration detainer on Seaside man charged with manslaughter

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has lodged an immigration detainer on a Seaside man who was arrested last week for manslaughter following a crash that left a baby dead.

Rony Tomas-Garcia, 23, was arrested on Feb. 15 following a single-vehicle crash on Ecola State Park Road. He is being held at the Clatsop County Jail on charges of manslaughter in the first degree, assault in the second degree, reckless driving and driving under the influence of intoxicants.

The immigration detainer was placed on Feb. 16.

Behind schedule, Seaside closes in on school campus completion

SEASIDE — The Seaside School District campus construction project “has a few more months to go but we’re moving forward,” project manager Jim Henry said at last week’s school board meeting.

The project dashboard shows the budget and schedule behind, while scope and community engagement are on target. The project cost is expected to reach \$131 million. To date, the school district has paid about \$127 million in expenses.

The project, authorized by voters by a bond in 2016 to move students from schools in the tsunami inundation zone, includes completion of exterior work at the middle and high school building and interior work at Pacific Ridge Elementary School.

Local officers to graduate from police academy

An Astoria police officer and a Clatsop County Sheriff’s Office deputy will graduate on March 4 from the basic police class.

A graduation ceremony will be held for Dayna Groder and Joseph Voelker at the Oregon Public Safety Academy in Salem.

The ceremony will be closed to the public because of the coronavirus pandemic.

— *The Astorian*

Cluster of small quakes would not have triggered new alert system

A cluster of small earthquakes far off the southern Oregon Coast and atop Mount Rainier in recent days are common events, and would not have triggered a seismic warning system set for a test run later this week ahead of its rollout to the public this spring, a seismologist said.

“Neither of those sequences are of particular concern,” said Paul Bodin, research professor at the University of Washington and manager of the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network.

The ShakeAlert system, which is designed to give people and automated systems advanced warning before significant shaking starts, would not have sent an alert for either sequence “because no one would’ve felt them,” either because of their small magnitude or distance from population centers, Bodin said.

A handful of quakes, the largest measuring magnitude 5.1, struck about 175 miles west of Bandon on Saturday, with smaller aftershocks Sunday morning. These occurred on a structure called the Gorda Escarpment, at the boundary between the Pacific and Juan de Fuca plates — a strike-slip plate, which, unlike the Cascadia Subduction Zone fault, does not pose a major tsunami risk.

Mount Rainier, meanwhile, let go “a volley of really tiny little earthquakes” last week, Bodin said, calling it a “swarmlet.”

— *Seattle Times*

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY

Clatsop Care Health District Board, 5 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board, 5:15 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Astoria Planning Commission, 5:30 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

Warrenton City Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.

WEDNESDAY

Astoria Parks Board, 6:45 a.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

THURSDAY

Sunset Empire Transportation District Board, 9 a.m., (electronic meeting).

Clatsop County Recreational Lands Planning Advisory Committee, 1 p.m., (electronic meeting).

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Climate program draws fire for leaving out natural gas power plants

By CASSANDRA PROFITA

Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon’s plans to regulate greenhouse gas emissions through a new climate protection program are facing criticism for leaving out natural gas power plants.

Last year, Gov. Kate Brown ordered the state Department of Environmental Quality to create a program that would cap greenhouse gas emissions from major industries and reduce them over time.

The agency has been working to develop the program for nearly a year, and last month it convened a new advisory committee to weigh in on the program’s rules for who will be regulated and how.

The rules are far from final, but environmental advocates say they’re already on the wrong track with too many exemptions that would allow industries to continue polluting and not enough commitment to the governor’s interim emission reduction targets for 2035.

One of their biggest complaints is that Department of Environmental Quality staff has decided to exclude the entire electricity sector from the program, including eight natural gas power plants across the state.

Zach Baker, with Oregon Climate Solutions, who sits on DEQ’s rule-making advisory committee for the program, said state data shows greenhouse gas emissions from natural gas power plants have gone up by about 58% since 2012.

“These emissions have actually been growing,” Baker said. “And we have no plan. There’s no plan in our state to address these at this point.”

DEQ staff says they’re not planning to regulate natural gas power plants because that could push utilities to buy electricity from natural gas plants out of state, where the department doesn’t have authority to extend its program regulations.

Richard Whitman, the director of the Department of Environmental Quality, told committee members at a meeting Wednesday that his agency is “not clear” on the best way to get to 100% clean electricity without help from the Legislature, and he’s hoping to see lawmakers pass a bill this session that “would make our work here at DEQ much easier.”

House Bill 2995 would put new clean energy emission restrictions on 100% of the electricity sold in Oregon



Michael Durham

The Carty Generating Station in Boardman is a natural gas power plant owned by Portland General Electric.

by 2035, effectively regulating greenhouse gas emissions from all natural gas power plants delivering electricity to the state.

“I completely agree that getting to 100% clean energy, clean electricity, is a critical part of getting control over our climate future,” Whitman said. “But to ask DEQ with its limited legislative authority to take on, in effect, 100% clean through the limited tools we have, we think there’s significant problems there.”

But the whole reason the governor issued an executive order on climate change was because the Legislature failed to pass a major climate bill last year, Baker said, so relying on the Legislature to regulate greenhouse gas emissions at this point is risky.

“We saw through the cap-and-invest conversations that we are not able to fully count on the Legislature to pass big ambitious climate legislation,” he said. “DEQ should be moving forward whether or not the Legislature is going to act.”

‘Accounting for the emissions’

Environmental advocates found support for their argument that the Department of Environmental Quality should include the electricity sector from Dan Kirschner, the executive director of the Northwest Gas Association, who said the electric utilities should be treated in the same way as the natural gas utilities, which are being regulated based on where their gas is burned — not where it originated.

“From my perspective, it’s about accounting for the emissions of consumption of electricity in Oregon,” Kirschner said. “It’s not about where that electricity is sourced. This program does not concern itself with the source of natural gas, which all of it comes from outside of Oregon, or almost all of it.”

“If we were to focus on

the consumption of electricity and it’s associated generation mix you don’t have to get into the whole world of where that electricity is coming from.”

But Bob Jenks, with the Oregon Citizens Utility Board, said he supports the Department of Environmental Quality’s decision to exempt the electricity sector because including it would actually take pressure off the other industries, such as transportation fuels, that the program would regulate.

“The electric sector is going well beyond the goals,” Jenks said. “They’re phasing out coal, replacing it with renewables and energy efficiency. I think the electric sector is going to be way ahead of the game. I worry if you bring the electric sector in here, the head room allows other polluters, other carbon emitters, other sectors, to do less. I think removing the electric sector is actually an advantage. It puts pressure on other sectors to clean up.”

Right now, Department of Environmental Quality staff are analyzing several policy options for achieving greenhouse gas emissions targets for 2035 and 2050. The most aggressive option would target a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 and a 90% reduction by 2050. The least aggressive option would only target an 80% reduction by 2050 without an interim target for 2035.

Nicole Singh, a senior climate policy advisor for the Department of Environmental Quality, walked through an overview of the program plans for capping emissions at Wednesday’s rule-making committee meeting. The state is planning to set one overall emissions cap that will be enforceable, as well as several smaller caps for industry sectors.

Singh said the state won’t assign individual limits to regulated entities, but it will be issuing compliance instruments for every 1 metric ton

of greenhouse gas emissions. Over time, the state will issue fewer of those permits for greenhouse gas emissions as it reduces the statewide emissions cap.

“The cap itself says this is the target, and we all have to get there,” Singh explained. “We don’t specify how you get there. We leave it up to each regulated entity to determine how to get to the goal. The idea is to allow flexibility in how entities reach the target.”

The plans would allow regulated entities to bank compliance instruments and save them for later if they don’t need them one year because they’ve reduced their emissions. The plans also allow for companies to trade those permits among themselves, and they also allow companies to invest in alternative ways of reducing emissions, such as paying for electric vehicles or charging infrastructure if they can’t reduce their own emissions enough to meet the lower requirements.

The program has three stated goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, prioritize equity for impacted communities and contain costs for businesses and consumers.

Too much on cost containment

Environmental advocates voiced concerns at the meeting that the Department of Environmental Quality was focusing too much on cost containment and wasn’t prioritizing equity the way the agency had told the public it would last year, and some argued including natural gas plants in the program is a key factor in making the program equitable to the people who live near gas plants.

“There’s some communities saddled with pollution from four of the six top polluters,” Dan Serres, with Columbia Riverkeeper, said. “This pollution lands on Latinx communities already facing prolonged periods of poor air quality, low level ozone, smog and VOCs. DEQ needs to back up and look at what affects front-line environmental justice communities. How do we meet our greenhouse gas goals while mitigating impacts on the most vulnerable communities?”

The climate protection program isn’t scheduled to launch until next year after a vote by the Environmental Quality Commission. Whitman told advisory committee members that the commission will make the final call on many of the contentious issues critics are raising in the rule-making process.

Tsunami Marijuana opens store in Seaside

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

SEASIDE — Tsunami Marijuana owners Craig Johnson and Tom Pruitt were best friends in college. Now they’re partners in a new dispensary on Roosevelt — about half-a-block south of the former high school, in a building formerly occupied by the Seaside Signal.

The duo will close their store off of U.S. Highway 26 but may use it as a processing facility to make oils, tinctures, edibles and concentrates, Johnson said.

Johnson grew up in Shady Cove and settled in Olympia, Washington, where he has owned an electrical contracting company for 25 years.

It was Johnson’s parents who suggested he get into the cannabis business.

“My family was very open in that way,” Johnson said. “They grew marijuana when I was a kid. So it was just part of and always around my family.



R.J. Marx/The Astorian

Craig Johnson and Tom Pruitt of Tsunami Marijuana.

And then when it was about to go legal, my dad was really on me. ‘Aren’t you going to get a grow? A store? When are you going to get into it?’”

With legalization in Washington state in 2012, Johnson started a grow facility and Pruitt, an “ex-casino slot guy,” at Emerald Queen Casino launched a dispensary. “We happened to run

into each other at dinner one night,” Johnson said. “He said what he’s doing and I said what I’m doing, and we said, ‘Why aren’t we doing this together?’”

They looked to Seaside, a middle point between Olympia and Johnson’s family in southern Oregon.

“I was looking to build an actual grow facility,” Johnson said. “When I was looking on (Highway) 26, it just happened to be one of those few properties in Clatsop County that you can grow on it, you can process on it, and then they said you can have a store on it. I really wasn’t looking

for a store when I started it. It just so happened the county said I could open a store there, too. I decided to open there and get all licenses for that piece of property.”

They started considering an in-town location about a year ago, Johnson said. “With so many restrictions kid-wise and spot-wise, there just wasn’t a lot available,” he said. “I looked at a lot of properties. When the old high school was closing this popped up as a viable property.”

Johnson hopes to have six full-time employees at the new location. Along with cannabis products, they plan to sell clothing, surfboards and boogie boards.

“We’re going to try and make it more of an ocean-like destination for tourists, but also make it the same comfortable location we’ve always had,” Johnson said.

Johnson will be among those in-house. “You’ll see me. I love being here. It’s like a retirement job,” he said.

“We are going to give our local Highway 26 people a discount,” Johnson said. “Being original customers, we always want to make sure they get a discount for keeping us in business for all these years.”

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