

TESTING: Asked Emergency Board to allocate money to pay for costs of testing

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what we saw in Portland was the community didn't have access to information, and in fact, when you have large institutions information can get lost over the years," said Emily Nazarov, operations policy analyst with the Oregon Department of Education, who headed up the rulemaking.

"By creating a plan you have one place that community members and parents can look to find out how does the school district address radon, how does the school district plan to address water."

The Board of Education pushed ahead with the rule despite protests from school advocates who said the timeline was too tight and expressed worry about where to find money to address the cost of

testing and mitigation.

"You are setting up a framework by which we have assurances at the state level that our schools are taking action in a comprehensive way toward health and safety," said Oregon Chief Education Officer Lindsey Capps. "It's an imperative that every student should be entitled to."

The requirement will entail hundreds of millions of dollars in additional costs to schools in the form of testing, supplying bottle water, mitigation and testing individuals who might have been exposed to high levels of lead, according to the Oregon School Boards Association.

Portland Public Schools estimates that taking those steps will cost that district an estimated \$7 million, said Joe Crelier, the district's director of risk management.

The cost of just testing lead in water for drinking and food preparation is estimated to cost \$10,000 for a small district and about \$1 million for a large district, according to district representatives who attended a July 25 meeting on the proposed rules.

Legislative leadership has asked the Emergency Board to allocate money in September to pay for costs of testing but not mitigation, Nazarov of ODE said. The Legislative Fiscal Office is working on a proposal to present to the Emergency Board Sept. 23, according to school advocates. Legislative Fiscal Officer Ken Rocco was not immediately available Wednesday to provide that number.

Gov. Brown in April directed the Oregon Department of Education and Oregon Health Authority

to review existing requirements for environmental testing and address the problem of lead in drinking water. During the review, health and education officials learned that neither the education department nor the health authority had rules to require schools test for lead.

The health authority has the power to require testing of public water systems, but schools are excluded from the agency's jurisdiction. The proposed rule would require school districts, charter schools and education services districts to conduct lead and radon testing and to submit an environmental monitoring plan to ODE for keeping water, air and physical spaces safe for students and staff.

The health authority already had authority to require schools to test for radon, but the new rule will provide comprehensive guidance

to schools on all of the testing required. Schools will be required to report their test results to the education department and to the community annually.

The agencies asked schools to test for lead during the summer. Most of the districts have either completed or are in the process of testing, Nazarov said. The agencies recommended that schools identify sources of lead, stop access, communicate results to staff, students, parents and the community and mitigate and repair the problem.

A survey of 104 schools earlier this month by the OSBA found that 88 percent of respondents were in the process of testing drinking water for lead. Most of the other 12 percent had either already tested water or had a plan in place to do so after classes resume in the fall.

SUICIDE: Taught them they have a choice

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She pondered the invitation, while researching Kenya and the rising number of suicides there.

Suicide is an uneasy subject almost anywhere in the world. Kenya, however, struggles more than most. Attempting to kill oneself in this African nation is illegal. Bodies of suicide victims are often flogged to remove demonic spirits and buried at night with no ceremony.

The World Health Organization ranks the nation 29th in the world at 15.58 per 100,000 deaths, but not all suicide is reported. Especially perplexing is the high suicide rate among youth. School stress triggers some of the suicide attempts, Womack said.

"They take exit exams which determine if they go up to the next grade," she said. "If they fail, they feel like they've shamed their family and they've wasted their sponsor's money. They can't bear the humiliation."

Womack accepted the invitation, not as the BMCC suicide prevention specialist, but as a longtime volunteer of Good Samaritan Ministries. She once directed the organization's Pendleton office.

Womack and her husband boarded a plane bound for Dubai on July 9. They flew next to Nairobi, then Kisumu. There, they climbed into a car and traveled two-and-a-half hours to the community of Uranga, a rustic town near the Ugandan border, with no running water, one paved road and a network of cow



Cindy Womack, of Pilot Rock, passes out school supplies to children in an elementary school in Kenya during a recent trip to the African nation. Her main reason for going to Kenya was to talk to teenagers about suicide prevention.

trails. Womack spoke to about 900 students at one middle school and two high schools. There was no language barrier, she said, since students spoke English, Luo and Swahili. During the sessions, Womack heard stories that were heartbreakingly similar. One boy despairing about school had told his mother he felt like committing suicide. When his mother dismissed the idea, he went outside and hung himself. Students also told Womack they worried about suicide running in their families. Some admitted they feared they would eventually kill themselves, just like other family members.

"It came down to teaching them that they have a choice, that justice is not something that just happens to them," she said. "It's something a person has to choose."

Since Kenyan students often use recitation to learn,

she instilled a new mantra, "I choose life."

The suicide discussion was complicated, though, because of the spiritual beliefs that shroud the subject. She said suicide is more taboo in Kenya than in the United States and even some counselors consider suicide the unforgivable sin.

"The kids brought up that if someone kills themselves, the people go and beat the body to get the sin out of it," she said. "There's a lot of superstition surrounding suicide."

Womack said her personal Christian faith helped her deal with this part of the discussion, but other topics were more typical of her U.S. presentation. She taught about the signs to recognize when someone is considering suicide.

"It comes down to the simplicity of knowing how to look for warning signs and

risk factors and being willing to ask in a non-judgmental way the question, "Are you having thoughts of suicide?"

Womack first became interested in suicide prevention after losing her best friend.

"In 1999, my closest friend in life called me from her mother's house in Boise," Womack said. "She indicated she was depressed. Suicide didn't even cross my mind. Looking back, I realized she dropped a number of clues and hints, but at that time I didn't know to ask the question."

Three days later, her friend's husband called to say she had died of suicide.

"Don't be afraid to ask the question," she told the Kenyan students.

In addition to speaking at schools, Womack also led a two-day training for 22 counselors.

Womack also offered a devotional message at a cabinet meeting of the governor of Siaya County where Uranga is located. Counties are similar to states in the U.S. Later, she and Terry dined with the governor.

Money raised by the Pilot Rock Baptist Church and surrounding community helped fund the mission as well as provide an online certification course for two Kenyan leaders on suicide prevention taught by the QPR (Question Persuade Refer) Institute.

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HOMICIDE: Four-day jury trial set for Sept. 6

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others, early in the morning of Jan. 27, drove from Hermiston to the Nelson residence. The group packed at least six loaded firearms and encountered Nelson while he and a female were in his car in his driveway.

Ayala and at least one other person shot at Nelson and his passenger, according to the document, but "she managed to crawl out of the vehicle and hid in the dark, cold night without being hit."

Ayala and the rest tried to chase in their pickup, but it became stuck in the snow. When they could not free the vehicle, the filing states, Ayala and Vargas walked up the driveway and continued to shoot at the female, who the state refers to as "Adult Victim 1."

Ayala then stole Nelson's

vehicle and fled with Vargas and a third person, stopping after a 10-mile police chase.

Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus charged McIver, of Umatilla, with murder with a firearm before dismissing the case in early February when federal prosecutors indicted the trio of defendants.

Ayala has made two requests for investigative documents and other discovery and, according to Martin, the government has provided more than 50 volumes of discovery and anticipates providing forensic analysis reports and other information.

McIver, Ayala, and Vargas remain in custody. The federal court set the case for a four-day jury trial in Portland starting Sept. 6, but Martin also noted the importance of waiting for forensic test results.



Madisen Haselbusch, 17, pets the belly of her Netherland dwarf rabbit, Oliver, on Wednesday at the Morrow County Fair in Heppner.

FAIR: Wendler will also show one steer, two ewes this week

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with their furry and feathered friends.

Wendler, who lives in Boardman, said showmanship is about proving they know how to handle their animal, and answering questions that demonstrate an understanding of the breed.

"It teaches me how to learn new things, such as how to care for the birds and how to show and present myself more clearly," Wendler said.

Beth Dudley, of Canby, served as the judge for small animal competitions. She said chickens and rabbits are judged based on the standards of their breed.

"The questions vary on the level of the kids," Dudley said.

Wendler might be finished with Chabo at the fair, but she'll remain busy with one steer and two ewes left to show. Sheep conformation will be held at 9 a.m. Thursday at the fairgrounds in Heppner, and livestock showmanship will be 9 a.m. Friday.

The Morrow County Fair runs through Sunday, and is open to the public each day at 8 a.m.

LEAD: City of Pendleton tests for lead every 3 years

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Out of the five IMESD facilities, plus several sites tested at the district's Outdoor School, almost all of them had no lead detected in their water.

Not every district had perfect results in their initial rounds of tests.

Both the Pendleton and Athena-Weston school districts recently reported several sites in their schools that showed high levels of lead.

Suzanne Skadowski of the EPA public affairs office said lead is a potent neurotoxin that is especially dangerous to young children.

According to the EPA, even low levels of lead in a child's blood can cause reduced IQ, learning disabilities and behavioral problems. High blood levels can cause coma, convulsions and even death.

"There's no safe level of lead," Skadowski said.

Instead of looking at lead in terms of acceptable levels or limits, the EPA uses a metric called an action level, a threshold that indicates lead levels are high enough to warrant pipe, faucet or some other infrastructural replacement.

The action level for public drinking sources is 15 parts per billion while schools are 20 parts per billion.

The challenge for Oregon schools is that the EPA's action level is a recommendation rather than a regulation. In fact, there are no federal regulations that mandate lead testing in schools. There were no state mandates until Wednesday.

Instead of testing themselves, school districts had relied on the EPA-mandated water quality reports from their home cities to assess lead levels. Skadowski said the EPA has been increasing its outreach to schools to encourage them to test themselves.

Pendleton Public Works Director Bob Patterson said the city's water supply is fairly neutral and non-corrosive, but that can change when it goes through private water systems.

Pendleton regulatory specialist Klaus Hoehna said the city tests for lead every three years and the last test was in 2014.

The city collects 32-35 pint-sized bottles from across the city, targeting homes that have older water systems and are more likely to have elevated lead levels.

According to the 2015 water quality report, 90 percent of Pendleton homes' water sources were 4.5 parts per billion or below, with only one home showing levels above 15.

Hoehna said he sends a notice to all residents that participate in the test, including the residents who have higher lead levels, although he has never received a response.

While cities have been doing water testing for years, schools are just starting to dip their toes into it and might need to retest.

Rich Long, a main-

tenance employee with the IMESD, said many districts collected their samples during the middle of summer vacation when school facilities are used infrequently.

The EPA recommends testing water sources after they've been unused no longer than 18 hours, meaning some of the test results may show a higher concentration of lead than it should.

Until then, all the faucets and water fountains that showed high lead levels are closed until they can be remedied.

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