

FIRE: Smoking materials the leading cause of civilian home fire deaths

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and intentional fires came in at No. 4 with 28,900.

While smoking materials — such as cigarettes — caused 17,600 fires, it is the leading cause of civilian home fire deaths.

The American Red Cross in Oregon and southwest Washington reported responding to 43 home fires and other disasters in the first 12 days of December, about double the usual amount.

Penninger said the Pendleton Fire Department would like to do more to educate the public on fire safety but lacks the staff to take that on. Penninger, for example, wears three hats in the department — as fire marshal he investigates fires, and he also is the assistant operations chief and assistant training chief.

“We’re doing the best we can with what we got,” he said, and the department walks a fine budget line to deliver all the services it can.

Penninger said there



Photo courtesy of Pendleton Fire Department

A cardboard box left on a stove started a fire Tuesday night at a home on Jones Circle, Pendleton. Shawn Penninger, assistant chief and fire marshal, said the occupants extinguished the burn before firefighters arrived.

are steps people can take to reduce their risk of fire, starting with reading a manufacturer’s instructions and warnings on using an appliance. A space heater, for example, may require at least 3 feet of empty space in all directions, which mean you cannot put its back against a wall.

He also suggested the

websites for the National Fire Protection Association — www.nfpa.org — and Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal — www.oregon.gov/osp/sfm/ — offer plenty of good information on fire safety.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

LAWS: Protections added for whistleblowers

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Sky lanterns

If you were planning on kicking off the new year by releasing a glowing Chinese lantern into the atmosphere for good luck, think again.

The lanterns (known as sky lanterns, Chinese lanterns, UFO balloons or wish lanterns) are “mini hot air balloons” made of a paper sack over an open flame that pushes the lantern into the air.

House Bill 4140 prohibits the release of the lanterns into Oregon airspace. Oregon fire marshal Mariana Ruiz-Temple called the uncontrolled, open-flame devices an “extreme fire hazard.”

“Once released you have no control over where they may land,” she said. “They could end up on someone’s rooftop, in a tree, or a pile of debris and cause an unwanted fire.”

The Class A violation will now be punishable by up to \$2,000 in fines.

Sex crimes

Victims of rape, child abuse or other first-degree sex crimes no longer need to worry about their abusers hiding behind a statute of limitations.

Senate Bill 1600 removed the 12-year statute of limitations on first-degree sex crimes in Oregon, as long as the prosecution has corroborating evidence of the crime or multiple victims come forward.

That law is joined by Senate Bill 1571, known as Melissa’s Law, which requires that all sexual assault forensic evidence kits be kept for at least 60 years after collection. It also directs the Oregon State Police to create a position or group of positions to handle inquiries from victims and other law enforcement agencies about the testing of kits, and prioritizes the testing of kits that are connected with active cases in which the victim has agreed to participate in prosecution.

Immigration consulting

If you’re an immigrant concerned about your status under a new presidential administration, you’ll be happy to know that fake immigration attorneys preying on worried immigrants will now face charges of obstructing justice if they get caught.

House Bill 4128 adds unlicensed immigration consulting “with the intent to defraud” to the list of reasons someone can be charged with obstructing governmental or judicial administration. It also adds offering unauthorized notary services

“with the intent to defraud.”

The new law amends Oregon’s definition of extortion to include threatening to reveal a someone’s immigration status to law enforcement if they (or a family member or friend) do not deliver services or goods or refrain from reporting illegal activity.

Obstruction is a Class A misdemeanor, while extortion is a Class B felony.

Whistleblower protections

Handing over evidence of your boss’s corruption, abuse or fraud won’t carry the same risks it used to thanks to the whistleblower protections implemented with House Bill 6047.

State employees and nonprofit workers will be given affirmative defense — which amounts to protection from criminal or civil penalties for the commission of a specific crime — for giving lawfully obtained information about wrongdoing to a law enforcement agency, regulatory agency or manager.

Prostitution

The definition of “promoting prostitution” has been expanded in Oregon, thanks to House Bill 4082.

Previously sex trafficking could only be prosecuted if the one “promoting prostitution” was receiving money or property in exchange for their role in facilitating the sexual encounter. The charge of promoting prostitution will now apply to receiving “goods and services derived from prostitution” including benefits like shelter or manual labor.

Postmortem account access

You can now leave your Twitter handle or Instagram photos to someone in your will. The Revised Uniform Fiduciary Access to Digital Assets Act addresses a problem for the digital age: People are having difficulty getting companies to give them access to their loved ones’ digital assets after they die.

Oregon’s legislature joined several other states in enacting the law, which requires social media companies and other online platforms to give access to social media accounts, blogs, online videos, photos stored in “the cloud” and other digital assets to fiduciaries named in wills, or give users an option such as Facebook’s “legacy contact” setting that allows users to name a third party who can access their account in the event of their death.

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RIZZO: Met in 2008, married in 2010

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gered spotted owls so they could work around them when possible.

She loved her job, but she longed to work with people again and start a family.

That’s when she met Marc through a dating website.

“I ordered him online,” Celeste said with a laugh. “Like Amazon Prime, he arrived in two days.”

Marc originally hailed from Johnstown, Pennsylvania, a town of roughly 21,000 people east of Pittsburgh.

He heard of a need for pharmacists in Oregon and ended up taking a position at a Wal-Mart pharmacy in Talent, which is just north of Ashland.

Marc and Celeste met in 2008, moved to Portland, and were married in 2010.

Two years later, the Rizzos moved again, this time to Hillsboro so that they could be closer to Pacific University, where Celeste pursued a degree in pharmacy.

By the time she was finishing up her degree in 2015, Celeste was pregnant. Shortly after she finished the program, Bianca was born.

While the Rizzos weren’t affected by Pendleton’s notorious housing crunch, having found their historic North Hill home relatively easily, finding childcare was a different matter.

Since Pendleton daycares typically don’t operate on the weekends and evening hours sometimes required by their jobs, Marc and Celeste elected to bring an Argentine au pair, who splits her time between watching the now 16-month-old Bianca and taking classes at Blue Mountain Community College.

When they’re not working, the Rizzos are ingratiating themselves in the community by taking advantage of youth-centric activities from Pendleton Parks and Recreation, the Children Museum of Eastern Oregon, the Pendleton Center of the Arts and the Pendleton Public Library.

Marc and Celeste are impressed with Pendleton’s hospitality and accessibility.

They recently attended a “Coffee with the City” event and were surprised how easy it was to access Pendleton’s mayor, an implausible scenario in Portland.

Yet Pendleton experience is complete without the Round-Up.

Although the Rizzos worked most of it — Marc saw an uptick in business from visitors who forgot their medication in their home towns while Celeste tended to injured revelers — they still carved out time to watch barrel racing and patronize some of the vendors.

With the Rizzos closing in on a year in Pendleton, the family is now trying to figure out to return the hospitality Pendleton has shown them.

“The goal is to give back in any way we can,” said Marc.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

BRIEFLY

Umatilla senior citizens invited to start new year with free meal

UMATILLA — Senior citizens can start the new year — or enjoy a late Christmas — with a free Christmas and New Year’s dinner catered by GG’s Smokehouse Catering, from 1 to 3 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 1 at the Umatilla Senior Center.

Citizens can enjoy a traditional Christmas Dinner including ham or turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, and pie. The dinner has been a tradition for the restaurant since its opening in 2013, and was rescheduled from its original December date due to bad weather.

“We always do this for Christmas or the holidays, so we wanted to make sure we got it done this year,” said owner Amber Bieren.

The event is open to all senior citizens.

Umatilla County Democrats and radio board reschedule meetings

PENDLETON — Umatilla County Democrats and the local community radio board have rescheduled their January meetings due to the New Year’s holiday.

The Umatilla County Democratic Party will meet Monday, Jan. 9 beginning at 6:30 p.m. in the Pendleton City Hall second floor jury room, 501 S.W. Emigrant Ave. All Umatilla County Democrats and those interested in participating in the Democratic Party are encouraged to attend. For more information, call Sue Peterson at 541-276-4569.

The KBLU-FM Community Radio board has moved its regular January meeting to Tuesday, Jan. 10 at 7 p.m. at the Bowman Building, 17 S.W. Frazer Ave., Suite 352. Anyone interested in local community radio is welcome. Contact Vickie Jackson at 541-566-2744 for more information.

Program provides information on how to prevent progression of Type 2 diabetes

HERMISTON — One out of every three American adults has pre-diabetes — and 90 percent don’t know it.

Prevent T2 Info Sessions will provide information on how to prevent or delay the progression of Type 2 diabetes. Participants can assess whether they’re ready to make lifestyle changes.

The informational session is Wednesday, Jan. 11 from 4-5 p.m. or 6-7 p.m. in Meeting Room No. 2 in the Good Shepherd Medical Office Plaza, 620 N.W. 11th St., Hermiston. Follow-up Prevent T2 classes will be scheduled to meet participant needs.

For more information, call Helena Wolfe at 541-561-5443.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to news@eastoregonian.com