

State begins workplace inspections over coronavirus complaints

Editor’s note: This article was originally published by The Oregonian/Oregon-Live, one of more than a dozen news organizations throughout the state sharing their coverage of the novel coronavirus outbreak to help inform Oregonians about this evolving health issue.

BY MIKE ROGOWAY
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon plans to begin inspecting

workplaces this week to evaluate employees’ complaints that their businesses are not doing enough to protect people from exposure to the coronavirus.

When Gov. Kate Brown ordered Oregonians to “stay home” to contain the spread of the deadly virus, she exempted construction and manufacturing from the directive. She allowed many other businesses to continue operating so long as they maintain a safe distance among employees

and take additional steps to prevent the virus for spreading.

Hundreds of Oregon workers say their employers are failing that test. The Occupational Safety and Health division fielded more than 1,100 complaints about coronavirus issues last week, according to Aaron Corvin, spokesman for the division. Surprise inspections could begin as early as Monday, according to Corvin, who said OSHA will not issue warnings.

“If we inspect and find violations, we cite,” Corvin wrote. “If we identify and classify violations as serious, there will be a penalty.”

OSHA will be looking for “a fact specific determination that will evaluate whether the employer has addressed this recognized hazard in a fashion that appears to be credible.”

Oregon’s approach differs from those in other states, including California and Washington, which

have shuttered a broad array of industries. While Brown ordered some industries to close, among them shopping malls, theaters, spas, bars and restaurants, except for takeout and delivery service, she gave others the latitude to decide for themselves whether they can operate safely.

Major Oregon employers including Intel, Precision Castparts and Lam Research have identified suspected coronavirus cases among their workers.

Intel and Precision Castparts continued operating, though some employees work from home. Lam shuttered its Tualatin operations for a thorough cleaning last week.

The governor’s stay-home order carries potential criminal penalties of up to \$1,250 in fines and up to 30 days in jail for violators. However, OSHA does not enforce criminal law so any action it takes would not include potential jail time.

Homeless: ‘That kind of generosity and kindness, it’s heartwarming’

Continued from Page A1

vides meals at Pendleton’s Stillman Park for whoever may need it and works closely with the area’s homeless population, and brought him on board to help coordinate.

With dependable help by her side, Innes now needed to secure a hotel to partner with the project.

Gov. Kate Brown’s stay-home order and general concerns about COVID-19 have devastated businesses around Oregon, and the tourism and lodging industries have been hit particularly hard, which has kept many hotels and motels mostly vacant.

Innes reached out to the Marigold Hotel, which not only agreed to the partnership, but has accommodated its new guests as best it can.

“The local staff has been so cooperative,” Innes said. “They have worked long hours and hard hours to make sure that everything is taken care of and anything we needed is addressed.”

An employee with the Marigold Hotel said the hotel was told not to comment on the agreement with CAPECO, and CAPECO could not be reached for comment on Tuesday.

Once the location was locked in, Innes said she began crafting basic rules for guests, drafted check-in sheets, and contacted Pendleton Police Chief Stuart



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Pendleton’s Marigold Hotel has been serving as the temporary home for more than 60 unhoused people amid the COVID-19 outbreak. The hotel’s rooms, paid for through money from CAPECO and other local outreach organizations, have been mostly full as a result.

Roberts to go over security and safety.

Innes said any person staying at the hotel had to sign in and register, and those who didn’t would be asked to leave. Though there’s been a couple of instances where the police have asked someone to leave or arrested somebody on an outstanding warrant, she said the community has overall been receptive to

the rules.

For the three daily meals being provided at the Marigold, the guests are asked to come through and keep the recommended 6 feet between themselves and others as they grab food and return to their rooms to eat.

The Salvation Army delivers lunches each day to the hotel, and Haskett usually cooks dinner using

ingredients donated by local organizations and individuals. Other organizations, such as Neighbor 2 Neighbor, which is led by Dwight Johnson and operates the Pendleton Warming Station that has shut down due to the pandemic, donated clothing and other supplies.

“It really is a community effort to do this,” Innes said.

For now the project is

operating indefinitely, but along with coordinating the logistics of meals and supplies, Innes submits a daily report to CAPECO with the number of rooms being occupied and people staying in them. These reports help the organization track the funding, which even Innes doesn’t know the extent of.

“As long as things run smoothly, (CAPECO) would

be happy to support in whatever way they can,” Innes said. “We know the state and federal government are making this kind of thing a focus, so we’ll see what happens.”

When the Oregon Legislature reconvenes for a special session to address the COVID-19 pandemic, resurrecting a bill that failed earlier this year is among the top priorities.

The bill — House Bill 4001 — would make it easier to site homeless shelters and allow parking lots to be used as transitional housing facilities where people could sleep in their vehicles, among other things.

For now, Innes, Haskett and a number of volunteers throughout the area are pulling together to help protect a vulnerable population with the local resources they have. And the people they’ve been helping protect have been showing the same selflessness.

Those staying at the hotel are chipping in to help move supplies, do laundry and clean up around the property. Innes said one man even gave his room away when a woman and child arrived needing shelter and he thought they needed it more than him.

“That kind of generosity and kindness, it’s heartwarming,” she said. “There are certain displays of humanity and general good kindness to one another. It never hurts to be kind.”

Brown: Private labs are testing individuals who don’t meet state criteria

Continued from Page A1

public health lab’s capacity for processing tests is severely limited, and needs to be reserved for the most serious cases — not people believed to be suffering from a cold, as Brown is.

“The Oregon State Public Health Laboratory is committed to prioritizing those tests for those who are most seriously ill,” state epidemiologist Dr. Dean Sidelinger told reporters on March 12. Those patients, he said, included people hospitalized with viral pneumonia, cases that have a high risk of exposure, and rapid testing for facilities like nursing homes where the disease is detected.

Many of the criteria Sidelinger laid out are still included in a FAQ from the Oregon Health Authority, which lists as a high priority patients hospitalized with

viral pneumonia, symptomatic people in long-term care facilities or prisons, and symptomatic people who “who pose risk to vulnerable populations.”

“For other individuals who have mild illness, we encourage them to stay home while they recover, as the vast majority of people will recover without needing any intervention,” Sidelinger said March 12. But if those people and their doctors did decide a test was needed, he added, “commercial laboratory testing is available and many of our local hospital systems are also stepping up their efforts to test.”

The state’s approach to public health lab resources does seem to have changed somewhat in recent weeks — but in a more restrictive direction, not less.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reported last week



AP Photo/Beth Nakamura, File

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown speaks during a press conference with state and local government officials on March 12, 2020, in Portland to talk about coronavirus plans and protocols in the state.

that the state had declined to order widespread testing in a Washington County assisted living center where COVID-19 had turned up, while it had been quick to do such testing at a Linn County veterans facility where an outbreak occurred

previously. Residents at both facilities are considered particularly vulnerable to the disease.

A spokesman for the state’s joint information center on COVID-19 response, Dylan Darling, confirmed Tuesday that strict criteria

were still in place for the state lab.

“Commercial and private labs are providing expanded capacity for individuals whose providers want to test them, but who don’t meet those criteria,” Darling wrote.

That would appear to apply to Brown, who began feeling ill late last week, her office said Monday. Brown’s husband, Dan Little, had also come down with symptoms, and been tested for COVID-19. The test came back negative.

Given her husband’s test, Brown had no plans to be tested for the disease early Monday, her office said. That changed in the afternoon, when her physician arranged for a test, and sent it to the state lab.

Asked how Brown’s test had qualified for the state lab, and whether she was prioritized because she

is the state’s chief executive, Boyle offered a short response: “The Governor’s testing was managed by her personal physician,” he wrote.

Darling, with the state’s coronavirus joint information center, referred questions about the governor’s test back to Boyle.

Testing capacity shortages have been a key hurdle as Oregon and other states seek to respond quickly to the spread of COVID-19.

While tests in the public health lab have been constrained, state officials in recent days have heralded expanded testing capacity by commercial labs like Quest Diagnostics and LabCorp. Local hospital systems are also working to ramp up testing.

As of Monday morning, 12,883 people had been tested in the state, according to the OHA.

Markets: ‘The last thing any of us needs right now is reduced access to food products’

Continued from Page A1

coronavirus restrictions as directed by the State of Oregon (attached) and are not in favor of allowing the market to occur until the state’s restrictions on social distancing are modified or eliminated,” wrote Corbett.

“Allowing the market would violate the prohibition on gatherings of more than 25 people and also the governor’s stated intent to encourage residents to stay home. I am very sorry.”

McCune’s heart sunk as he read the message.

In a story on the East Oregonian website Tuesday, written before this latest

development, McCune said that this year’s Market would go forward sans the usual kids activities, musical performers and hot food booths. Produce booths would be spaced farther apart and patrons would be encouraged to refrain from handling the fruit and vegetables.

In the aftermath of reading the email, McCune worried about vendors.

“This will be a crushing blow to our vendors who rely on income from our market, and no doubt a big disappointment to our patrons,” he said. “We hope to resume the market on Main Street as soon as the city resumes approval to use the

300 block.”

Despite his disappointment, McCune said he understands the dilemma the city faces.

“It’s a bummer,” he said, “but I also understand the city’s perspective to put the safety of residents first.”

On Tuesday, Corbett said this was not a city council decision, but rather fell in his purview in approving or rejecting permit requests. The farmers market board recently requested moving from the 300 block of South Main Street to a nearby parking lot across Main from the Chamber of Commerce. The move would have allowed better social distancing and

possibly a drive-thru market.

Corbett said in light of the governor’s stay home order last week, “I feel having a farmers market would violate the intent of that” in the same way as festivals and other gatherings.

“It doesn’t seem practical to believe that’s something the state intended to allow,” he said.

Kelly Crane, executive director of the Oregon Farmers Market Association, is disappointed.

“We know that (the Pendleton Farmers Market) is a well-run market, whose operators care deeply about their community and are likely to do everything pos-

sible to keep them safe and healthy,” Crane wrote in an email. “The last thing any of us needs right now is reduced access to food products — especially with the potential supply chain disruptions that we might be seeing in the near future if the COVID-19 outbreak continues as projected by health experts.”

She said she hopes the market can find a different home that allows them the physical space needed to create social distance and enact other required safe shopping practices for their customers and vendors.

“I think, honestly, that it is a matter of misunderstanding,” she said. “The

Governor’s office, as well as the Oregon Department of Agriculture, has classified farmers markets as “essential businesses,” and has worked with us to provide safe guidelines for markets in order to be able to support them staying open.”

Oregon Farmers Market Association guidelines include providing social distancing officers to enforce social distancing. Markets are also expected to nix samples, restrict hot food sales, cancel nonessential programming, remove all seating, include hand washing stations and require increased spacing between booths.