

Some state employees to get COVID-19 hazard pay

BY HILLARY BORRUD
The Oregonian

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown has agreed to award state workers who were required to report to work in person during the pandemic one-time “COVID hazard payments” of up to \$1,550 under new tentative labor agreements.

All state employees who had to work in-person for at least 480 hours between March 8, 2020, and June 30, 2021, will be eligible, according to a summary of the tentative deal the state

reached with SEIU 503. A member of AFSCME Council 75’s bargaining team on Tuesday, July 27, confirmed that union reached the same deal.

To be eligible for the top amount, employees must have worked at least 1,040 mandatory in-person hours, the equivalent of 26 40-hour weeks. Employees who worked fewer mandatory in-person hours but met the 480-hour minimum will receive \$1,050, according to SEIU 503’s online announcement of its tentative labor agreement with the state.

A state spokesperson clarified on July 28 that all state employees who meet those thresholds will be eligible for the payments, regardless of whether they are represented by a union.

During the five-month legislative session that ended in June, unions pushed hard for lawmakers to approve “essential worker” stimulus payments and some lawmakers supported the idea.

But legislators could not agree which workers should receive the payments, so a broad proposal that would

have benefited categories of workers across the economy — including the private sector — never gained much traction. The \$450 million proposal also envisioned \$1,200 back-to-work incentive payments for front-line workers who collected unemployment during the pandemic. Front-line workers who stayed on the job would have received \$2,000 in stimulus money, The Oregonian reported.

Christina Sydenstricker Brown, a direct support specialist who cares for people with intellectual and

developmental disabilities with co-occurring mental health issues, is a member of AFSCME’s bargaining team. Sydenstricker Brown said she expects approximately 1,000 state employees to qualify for the additional overtime payment, including workers at the Department of Corrections, Oregon Youth Authority, state psychiatric hospital and the stabilization and crisis unit where she works.

Sydenstricker Brown said she and her co-workers played an essential role during the pandemic,

donning full personal protective equipment to provide in-person care to people with special needs.

“Just working through that and the anxiety that the individuals and my peers and myself felt was stressful,” Sydenstricker Brown said. “But we did the job ... We kept Oregon going through this pandemic and we still are keeping Oregon going through this pandemic. So I just want to thank all my co-workers and all the other essential workers out there that helped keep Oregon going.”

BOOTLEG FIRE | FIREFIGHTING PRACTICES

Brown: Oregon must modernize



Arden Barnes/The Herald And News via AP

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown visits the Bly Fire Camp on the southern edge of the Bootleg Fire in Klamath County on Wednesday, July 28, 2021.

Governor’s remarks occur during tour of the Bootleg Fire

By JOE SIESS
Klamath Falls Herald and News

BLY — Gov. Kate Brown visited the nation’s largest wildfire on Wednesday, July 28, flying past 413,000 acres of burned forest in a helicopter, then speaking with fire officials in Bly.

After seeing the devastation, Brown said the state has to rethink how it fights wildfires in an era of hotter, larger blazes — and mitigate dangers before they spark.

“There is absolutely no question that we need to modernize our firefighting practices,” she said.

Brown acknowledged the difficulty that Klamath County communities, and the broader region, are facing in a summer compounded by COVID, drought and now wildfire.

“My heart goes out to the people of the Klamath Basin,” the governor said. “This is a really challenging summer.”

We know this is going to be an incredibly challenging fire season, and obviously we’ve got the challenges around drought.”

Brown said the state is committed to assisting displaced families as quickly as possible, and said

federal assistance is on the way.

“This is an all hands on deck moment,” she said, promising to call Rep. DeFazio, D-Springfield, chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, who is leading alongside Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, a delegation pushing for Federal Emergency Management Agency readiness.

Brown said there are other ways for the state to prove its readiness.

“We must do more of the preventative mitigation work (such as) the thinning and the prescriptive burning,” she said from fire camp in Bly. “The goal is to eliminate biomass fuel

off the forest floors so that you either prevent fires or if there are fires, it is not as damaging.”

Brown said stopping wildfires before they start is smarter policy, but crews also need the workers and funds necessary to fight them when they get out of hand. Brown said megafires are threatening Oregon communities, damaging to the environment, dangerous for firefighters and expensive for taxpayers.

“The challenge is these fires are substantially hotter. They are faster; they are simply much more ferocious than in decades past,” she said. “So we have to make sure that we have both the people power and the equipment to tackle them.”

State authorizes wolf kill

Baker County rancher allowed to kill up to four wolves from Lookout Mountain Pack

Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife issued a permit Thursday, July 29, allowing a Baker County ranching couple, or their designated agents, to kill up to four wolves from the Lookout Mountain Pack.

The pack, which consists of an estimated nine wolves, has attacked cattle four times in the past two weeks, killing two and injuring two others and has been determined to be chronically depredating and presents a significant risk to livestock present in the area, according to an ODFW press release.

The permit allows the livestock producers or their agents to kill up to four uncollared wolves in a designated area, a mix of private land and public land where they have a grazing permit, where wolves are determined to be a significant risk to livestock present. The permit expires Aug. 21 or when livestock are removed from the area, whichever comes first.

ODFW staff may kill wolves included in the permit to assist the producer. The permit does not allow killing of the pack’s breeding pair, both of which have tracking collars.

Under the Wolf Plan rules, livestock producers must be using and document non-lethal methods appropriate to the situation before lethal control can be considered. Also, there can be no identified circumstances on the property, such as bone piles or carcasses, that could be attracting wolves.

ODFW found no attractants during its investigations of depredations. The producers have been implementing nonlethal measures for years and since January 2021 these measures included night checking of calving cows, use of rag box, placing calving cows near house and barns in small 30-acre pastures, hazing wolves out of the calving areas, burying dead calves and cows and frequent communication with ODFW on the wolves’ location.

Since cattle were placed in the large rangeland pastures, the livestock producers have checked them frequently, placed cows in specific pastures based on wolf activity, and recorded and communicated wolf presence to ODFW and neighboring producers. Since the depredations started on July 14, producers have increased their human presence, hazed wolves using firearms, removed injured livestock from pastures, and shifted cattle to pastures with less forage available to try and prevent further conflict.

The Lookout Mountain wolves were first documented in 2019 and were documented as a breeding pair for the first time in 2020, meaning they had two pups that survived through the end of the year. Four wolves including two pups were documented at the end of 2020 and seven 2021 pups were observed in May. Both adult breeders have functioning radio collars.

Lethal action is authorized with the goal of putting an end to the chronic depredation but livestock producers also will continue to use nonlethal measures.

Vaccination rates vary greatly depending on where you live

By SUZANNE ROIG
The Bulletin

SALEM — Vaccination rates drop significantly outside of the Portland metro area, according to results of a Oregon Values and Beliefs Center survey.

The online survey of Oregon residents showed the three counties making up the Portland area had a 77% vaccination rate. In the survey, 42% overall said they had not received a COVID-19 vaccine.

The survey conducted July 9-14 of 1,464 residents has a margin of error for the full sample ranging from plus or minus 1.5% to plus or minus 2.6%, depending on the response category for any given question.

The survey results mirror those from December 2020 that gauged how likely someone would be to get the vaccine when it became available. The results were published at the same time Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced the state would follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indoor-mask guidelines.

People who identified as

socially conservative were four times as likely to say they would not receive the vaccine than those who said they were liberal. What’s more, nearly all those surveyed who said they were college educated reported having received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

“In Oregon, as in most other states, vaccination has become a politically polarized issue,” said Amaury Vogel, Oregon Values and Beliefs Center associate executive director. “Political ideology when it comes to social issues, is a strong predictor of whether or not a person has received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.”

As of Thursday, July 29, the Oregon Health Authority reported 30,936 people have been fully vaccinated or are in progress in Umatilla and Morrow counties. That translates to about 44% of the population who are 18 and older in the two counties, according to the OHA data.

“Oregonians who remain unvaccinated share the same reasons as being the most

influential in their decision not to get vaccinated: Long- and short-term side effects and the concerns that the vaccine was developed too quickly,” Vogel said.

The Oregon Values and Beliefs project, a nonpartisan charitable organization, has partnered with Pamplin Media Group, EO Media Group and the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. EO Media Group owns newspapers in Oregon and Washington state, including the East Oregonian.



Mary Altaffer/The Associated Press, File/Bend Bulletin

A health care worker fills a syringe with the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, Thursday, July 22, 2021, at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. The number of Americans getting a COVID-19 vaccine has been rising in recent days as virus cases once again surge and officials raise dire warnings about the consequences of remaining unvaccinated.



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