

# Compliance is strong for COVID-19 rule at EOU

By **DICK MASON**  
*The Observer*

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University's new COVID-19 vaccination rule is not having an impact on the employment status of its on-campus staff and is unlikely to in the future, according to statistics from the school.

The rule took effect Oct. 23, and all of Eastern's on-campus staff is complying with it, according to Tim Seydel, EOU's vice president for university advancement. The new rule requires all of EOU's on-campus staff to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 or to have an approved religious, philosophical or medical exemption.

Eastern's website indicates that, as of Oct. 14, 80.1% of its on-campus employees are vaccinated and 17.7% of the others have received religious or medical exemptions. Seydel said that of Eastern's 450 on-campus employees only three have not met the requirements of the new rule, including one who is a new employee. Each of the three are now in the process of coming into compliance with the mandate.

"Among employees, we have had a 100% response rate," Seydel said. "All employees have a vaccina-

tion or exemption on file, or are in process."

He said Eastern officials are happy with the staff's buy in.

"We are very pleased with the responsiveness to ensure we maintain a safe and healthy campus," Seydel said.

The compliance rate for on-campus students is now about 88% in terms of how many have submitted vaccination or exemption forms as of Oct. 23. A total of 76.7% of these have been vaccinated and 23.3% have submitted exemption forms according to EOU's website. Eastern data indicates 131 on-campus students have not submitted COVID-19 forms. The 131 represent about 12% of EOU's on-campus students.

Seydel said any of the 131 who do not comply with the new rule will not be allowed to register for winter term classes.

## Exemption rates

A report by Oregon Public Broadcasting indicates the student exemption rates at EOU and Oregon Institute of Technology, where the rate is about 22%, are roughly double what's found at the state's other public universities. Seydel said the reason is many of the students EOU recruits are from Eastern Oregon, Southeastern Wash-



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

**An Eastern Oregon University student walks across the campus Thursday, Oct. 28, 2021. The vaccine exemption rate for students and faculty at Eastern is roughly double that of Oregon's other public universities. Approximately 24% of students and 18% of employees at EOU have vaccination exemptions, as compared to the average of 10% at other public universities in Oregon, according to Oregon Public Broadcasting.**

ington and Western Idaho and these areas have a higher number of people who do not want to be vaccinated.

"Our recruits reflect this," Seydel said.

The vice president for university advancement noted Eastern and all public universities in Oregon have high on-campus vaccination rates compared to their surrounding communities.

"Public universities are a safe place to be," he said.

All of Oregon's public universities are testing students and employees weekly, except EOU, Portland State University and Western Oregon University, according to OPB.

Seydel said it would not be feasible to test students and staff every week. He noted all students who suspect they have COVID-19 can get tested at EOU's student health center. He also pointed out that free testing is

provided in the community.

Many students now coming in to get tested at the student health center do not test positive for COVID-19.

"A lot of students have colds," said Seydel, who said that this is not unusual for this time of year.

## Spreading the word

EOU has more experience, Seydel said, than any other public university in the state with provid-

ing on-campus instruction during the pandemic. He noted that in the fall of 2020, Eastern was Oregon's first public university to offer on-campus classes since the pandemic started. The operations plan EOU used then, before a vaccine was available, is similar to the one now in place.

"We have had the same protocol for more than a year and it has been successful," he said, adding all students were tested for COVID-19 at the start of the 2021-22 academic year.

Dixie Lund, a member of EOU's board of trustees, is impressed with how EOU got the word out about its forthcoming vaccination rule well in advance of Oct. 23.

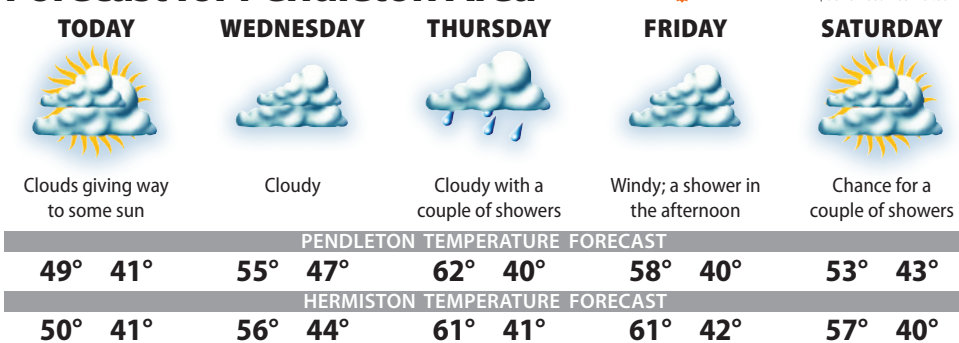
"A lot of preliminary work was done. Nobody could say, 'I didn't know,'" she said.

Lund, who served two stints as interim president of Eastern, said any potential objection to the vaccination rule dropped off after people learned exemptions were available.

Eastern is continuing to require all students and staff to wear masks. Lund realizes this rule is hard on students and staff.

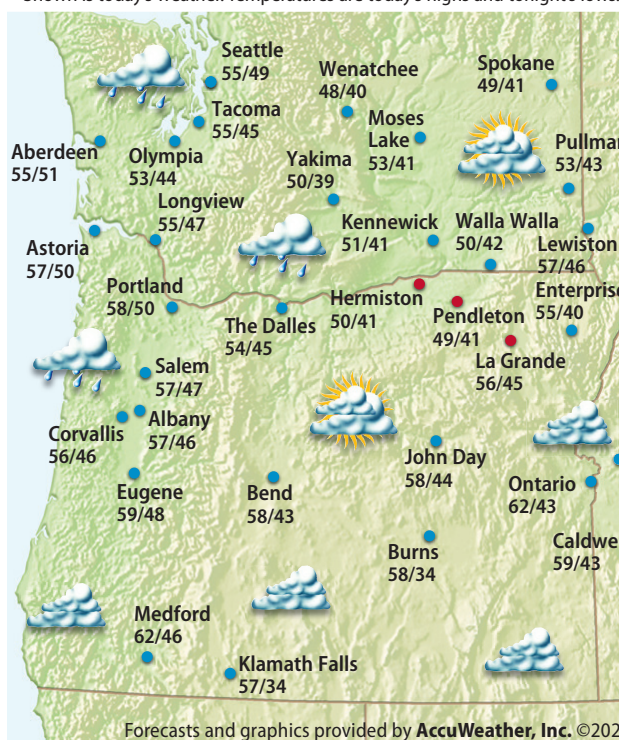
"I sympathize with students. Masks make it hard to stay focused on a lecture because communication is not as clear," she said.

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



## ALMANAC

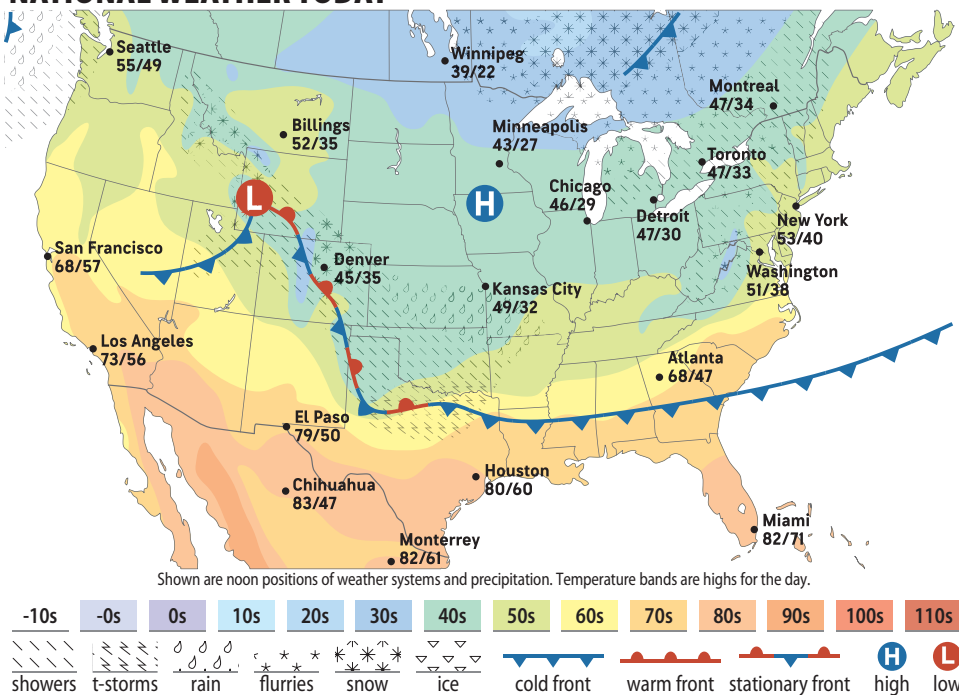
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	44°	29°
Normals	57°	36°
Records	76° (1901)	12° (1935)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace	
Month to date	0.00"	
Normal month to date	0.04"	
Year to date	6.03"	
Last year to date	9.83"	
Normal year to date	10.36"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	48°	30°
Normals	58°	35°
Records	72° (1988)	8° (2003)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace	
Month to date	0.00"	
Normal month to date	0.03"	
Year to date	3.92"	
Last year to date	2.29"	
Normal year to date	6.50"	
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	Wed.	
Boardman	NNE 3-6	NE 3-6
Pendleton	N 4-8	NNE 4-8
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	7:36 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	5:40 p.m.	
Moonrise today	4:36 a.m.	
Moonset today	4:55 p.m.	

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 93° in Zapata, Texas Low 0° in Cut Bank, Mont.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



# Dayville Mercantile owner fighting to avoid foreclosure

By **STEVEN MITCHELL**  
*Blue Mountain Eagle*

DAYVILLE — The owner of the Dayville Mercantile would like to be celebrating the historic store's 125th anniversary, but instead he finds himself fighting to stave off foreclosure.

Founded in 1896, the Old West-style emporium is one of the oldest continuously operating stores in the state, but it might not hold that title much longer: Scott Knapp, who took over ownership of the Dayville Merc at the start of 2020, could be forced to close up shop after representatives of the Graves Family Trust, the store's previous owners, implemented foreclosure proceedings in July.

Up until then, according to Knapp, he had been making interest-only payments to the Graves family, an arrangement he worked out after his restaurant hood-cleaning business — which he was using to subsidize the Merc — was forced to shut down for a time because of COVID-19.

Knapp said the Graves family chose not to renew the

interest-only payment plan after June. Instead, he said they offered him \$50,000 to take the Merc back. Knapp called the offer an insult, considering he has spent \$200,000 of his own money to keep the historic general store open.

Graves Family Trust attorney Douglas J. Raab did not immediately respond to the Blue Mountain Eagle's request for comment for this story.

However, the trust has been publishing a paid advertisement in the newspaper as part of the foreclosure process. The ad states Knapp owes \$489,258.58 on the property plus interest and past-due payments dating back to February.

If the balance due is not paid in full, along with foreclosure costs and attorneys' fees, the ad states the Merc will be sold at auction on the steps of the Grant County Courthouse on Dec. 3.

Knapp told the Eagle that seeing the Merc put up for sale has tested him personally because he and his father both

live on the property.

Knapp said his family lost their home east of Eugene during the 2020 Holiday Farm Fire, which ranked among the largest wildfires in Oregon's history.

"That was the point (after the Holiday fire) that I decided that we were going to fight for what was ours," Knapp said. "The Merc is our home."

Knapp said it is important to note the Graves family — specifically Jay Graves, who Knapp referred to as the family patriarch — worked with him in the beginning. But when they decided not to renew the interest-only payment plan, Knapp said, they left him with no other choice but to file for Chapter 13 bankruptcy.

Chapter 13 bankruptcy, which is referred to as a "wage earner's plan," allows people with regular income to develop a plan to repay all or part of their debts. Under this chapter of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code, debtors propose a payment plan to make installments to creditors over three to five years.

## IN BRIEF

### Walla Walla man dies in crash near Wallula Junction

WALLULA — A 19-year-old Walla Walla man died Saturday, Oct. 30, in an early morning crash involving a semitrailer that closed U.S. Highway 730 about 5 miles south of Wallula Junction for several hours.

Desmond G. Swenson-Leaks was killed at about 3:40 a.m. when his westbound 2015 Ford Focus reportedly crossed the center line, hitting an eastbound semi with double trailers driven by Scott Syverson, 44, of Post Falls, Idaho, according to Washington State Patrol.

Syverson was not injured, and there were no passengers or other vehicles involved in the crash.

The Washington State Department of Transportation reported both lanes of the highway from the Oregon state line to Wallula Junction closed at about 5 a.m. Oct. 30. The road was reopened at around 9:30 a.m.

The cause of the collision that totaled both vehicles is under investigation. The drivers were wearing seat belts, and it is unknown whether drugs or alcohol were involved, according to the WSP report.

— *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin*

## CORRECTION

The A3 story "Graffiti vandals deface mural and fence along Pendleton River Parkway" published Tuesday, Oct. 5, misspelled the name of a source. His name is Mark Vichas.

**CORRECTIONS:** The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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