

Hanford workers urged to lose jobs rather than get vaccine

By ANNETTE CARY
Tri-City Herald

RICHLAND, Wash. — Several hundred Hanford and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory workers were urged to stand firm against a federal COVID-19 vaccine mandate at a rally last week in Richland, Washington.

An estimated 16,000 workers at Hanford and PNNL who are paid with federal public money are required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 or receive a religious or medical exemption to keep their jobs.

"In the end what counts is not ditching your values for high-paying jobs," said Ben Stafford, who said he was among workers who could lose their jobs.

The deadline for the majority of those workers — employees of the Department of Energy's contractors and subcontractors at Hanford — have until Dec. 8 to show they are fully vaccinated against the virus.

Luis Ojeda, owner of a small business that does Hanford subcontracting, said he was "willing to lose everything" rather than enforce the vaccine mandate.

"I will not ask for a vaccine card," he told the crowd. "I will not violate medical privacy."

He said he believes the vaccine requirement is not constitutional.

"We the people will not live in fear over mandates the government will throw on us," he said.

The two-hour rally was in a parking lot on Stevens Drive in Richland, across the street from Stevens

Center, where DOE Hanford workers and many contractors have offices.

Vaccine mandate lawsuits

"Do not tolerate tyranny," urged Republican Rep. Brad Klippert, a sheriff's deputy from Kennewick, at the rally.

He argued most people who contract COVID-19 survive the disease.

Two attorneys said they were working on filing lawsuits on behalf of Hanford and PNNL workers.

Hanford employs about 11,000 people for \$2.5 billion in annual work on environmental cleanup of the 580-square-mile site adjoining the Tri-Cities in Eastern Washington. Plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons program was produced there throughout the Cold War.

PNNL, a Department of Energy research laboratory, employs more than 5,000 people, most based in Richland. Battelle, which holds the contract to operate the national lab, is requiring workers to be vaccinated or have an approved exemption by Nov. 15, ahead of the federal mandate.

The Silent Majority Foundation announced plans for a class action lawsuit in October, and the nonprofit's director and lead attorney Pete Serrano said at the rally he hoped to file the lawsuit within the next 10 days.

About 150 Hanford and PNNL workers have signed up as plaintiffs, said Serrano, who also is a Pasco city councilor.

Tracy Tribbett, an attorney with



Jennifer King/Tri-City Herald

Washington state Rep. Brad Klippert, R-Kennewick, speaks to hundreds of people who gathered in a north Richland parking lot along Stevens Drive on Wednesday, Nov. 3, 2021, to rally against the federal vaccine mandate on behalf of Hanford and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory workers.

the Pacific Justice Institute in Seattle, said she also was looking to file lawsuits on behalf of Hanford and PNNL employees.

The Southern Poverty Law Center calls Pacific Justice Institute a hate group, based on its anti-LGBT stands, but the institute describes itself as a legal organization specializing in the defense of religious freedom and other civil liberties.

Tribbett said her lawsuits would take a different tack than the Silent Majority Foundation and the two different legal strategies would complement each other.

"All of you can band together and walk out of your jobs to show that your employers need you more than you need them," she said.

Vaccine opposition

Much of the rally was devoted to testimonials, some submitted in writing and then read to the crowd, from people who believed they or

family members had been harmed by the COVID-19 vaccine.

One example was a person who was vaccinated and shortly afterward was diagnosed with abdominal pain diagnosed as diverticulitis.

In most cases, people said doctors did not confirm that illnesses were related to the vaccine.

The Benton Franklin Health District said that no resident of Benton and Franklin counties has died from the vaccine.

Since early this year when the vaccine was widely available, however, more than 200 people in the Tri-Cities area have died from complications of COVID-19, say health officials.

Data through September shows all but 16 of those who died were unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated.

Among the speakers at the rally was Dr. Wei-Hsung Lin of West Richland, who is among the small

minority of doctors who believes the COVID-19 vaccine is not safe and effective.

He immigrated from China at age 24, and he likened the vaccine mandates to that country's former policy of allowing couples to have only one child, with enforcement that ranged from fines to abortions and sterilization.

"Now we are living in a situation where our government is going to enforce something to be introduced into our body without our consent or we would have to lose our job," he said.

PNNL said when it announced its COVID-19 vaccine requirement in September that 86% of its employees had at least one dose of the vaccine then.

The Department of Energy has declined to say how many Hanford nuclear reservation workers have provided proof of vaccination.

"Like other federal agencies, we are continuing to collect vaccination information from employees as we approach the deadline," DOE said in a statement Wednesday, Nov. 3.

Hanford employees who work for DOE have an earlier vaccine deadline, Nov. 22, than federal contractor and subcontractor employees at the site.

On Oct. 28 a stop-work order filed by an employee concerned about COVID-19 controls led to a work stoppage at one contractor, Hanford Mission Integration Solutions.

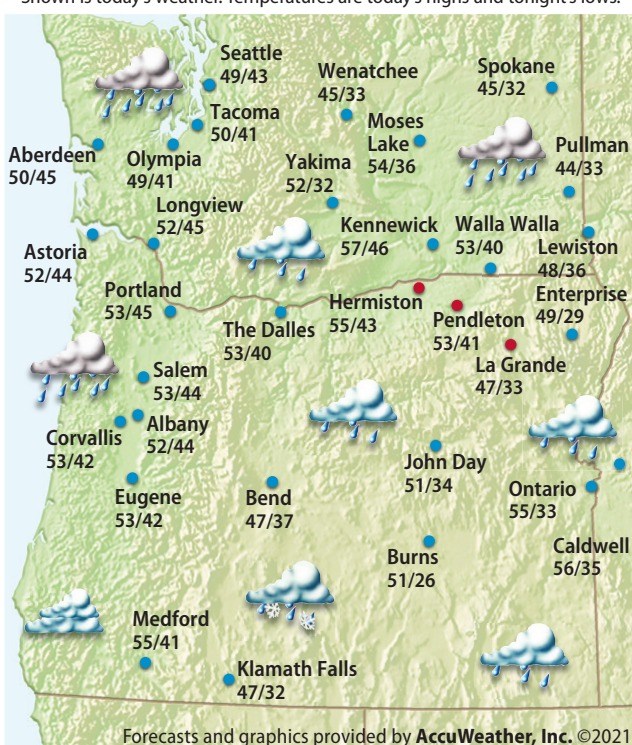
Workers who have a safety complaint can ask that work be stopped until it is resolved.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Shows around; winds subsiding	Intervals of clouds and sun	Rain and drizzle in the p.m.	Cloudy with a bit of rain	Breezy in the morning
PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
53° 41°	50° 46°	53° 45°	57° 50°	57° 43°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
55° 43°	56° 45°	55° 47°	58° 51°	61° 44°

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	57°	35°	
Normals	54°	35°	
Records	68° (1995)	20° (1936)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	0.20"		
Normal month to date	0.35"		
Year to date	6.23"		
Last year to date	11.47"		
Normal year to date	10.67"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	60°	30°	
Normals	54°	34°	
Records	71° (1978)	11° (1936)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace		
Month to date	0.20"		
Normal month to date	0.27"		
Year to date	4.12"		
Last year to date	3.43"		
Normal year to date	6.74"		
WINDS (in mph)			
Today	Wed.		
Boardman SW 10-20	WSW 4-8		
Pendleton NW 10-20	WSW 6-12		
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	6:46 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	4:31 p.m.		
Moonrise today	12:30 p.m.		
Moonset today	9:03 p.m.		
First	Full	Last	New
Nov 11	Nov 19	Nov 27	Dec 3

Union County to host MERA forest management field review

DICK MASON AND
DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

IF YOU GO

What: Field review opportunity for planned forest management of Red Apple Project at MERA

Where: Owsley Canyon Trailhead

When: Wednesday, Nov. 10, at noon

Additional information: Union County MERA, 541-963-1319

LA GRANDE — The Union County Board of Commissioners will take public input on what could be a major forest management project at the Mount Emily Recreation Area.

The meeting will serve as a field review for a potential commercial timber harvest plan that would take place in the winter and spring of 2022. The plan would involve closing portions MERA for timber harvest in the Red Apple area for the primary purpose of reducing fire risk and improving forest health.

Local residents can participate and ask questions at the Owsley Canyon Trailhead at noon Wednesday, Nov. 10.

"We want input," Commissioner Paul Anderes said.

'It needs to be managed'

It has been about 15 years since the Red Apple area was logged.

"It needs to be managed," said Forrest Warren, a member of the MERA advisory committee.

Forest management work is needed to reduce tree density and the build up of fuels to cut the risk of high intensity fires. Work will involve the removal of dead and diseased trees.

Warren said he believes some healthy trees also might have to be logged to allow for the project to be profitable for the company removing them.

"To make it financially feasible some good trees will have to be taken out," he said.

Warren said from a financial standpoint it might be best to do the thinning now because the price of timber is up. Still, Warren said, this is not something that should be rushed into.

"It is easy to do something that will take a long time to

heal," he said. "It is important not to do something that takes 10 years to heal up so that it looks like a forest again."

Warren said it is important that the thinning and removal of fuels and other forest management be done, but he does not believe it is essential that it be done this winter.

"Forest management is a long-term thing," he said.

Coming under fire

Warren said steps already have been taken in recent years to thin trees and remove fuels in the Red Apple area and reduce fuel loads, something he credited the county with.

The original project was proposed in the fall of 2020, with an emphasis on logging, precommercial thinning and fuels treatment. That proposal showed that approximately 190 acres of the recreation area would be logged, as well as follow-up commercial thinning and damaged tree removal.

The county purchased the nearly 3,700 acres of land at MERA in 2008, with the \$4.65 million cost being financed by grants from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department's all-terrain vehicle program and the Blue Mountain Habitat Restoration Council. The Union County Parks Department and the MERA Advisory Committee manage MERA's trails.

The project has drawn

criticism from some, such as Friends of Mount Emily Recreation Area. The group, along with other voices in the community, have noted the logging could have an adverse effect on the well-being of recreational trails as well as winter recreation activities.

Bart Barlow, a former member of the MERA Advisory Committee, said fire mitigation is important at the recreation area but the proposed logging could be detrimental.

"I'm not opposed to logging or forest management, but it needs to be done right for the recreation area," he said. "The more information the county can get out, the more people can get involved in things."

Warren said he believes it is critical to keep MERA as a site that offers recreational opportunities to so many. He noted it is an important part of Union County's economic engine because it draws in so many people from outside the area.

"What MERA means to our economy is huge," he said.

Warren also said some residents have told him MERA is the reason they live in Union County.

There is no definitive timeline in place for when the forest management project would begin, but the field review meeting will likely provide answers from the county. The meeting also serves as an opportunity for public input and Q&A.

Anderes said the work would be done in the winter since the snow and ice cover often present would limit the impact tree removal work would have on soil. He said he wants MERA managed for forest health, fire resiliency and for the purpose of maintaining the recreation opportunities it provides.

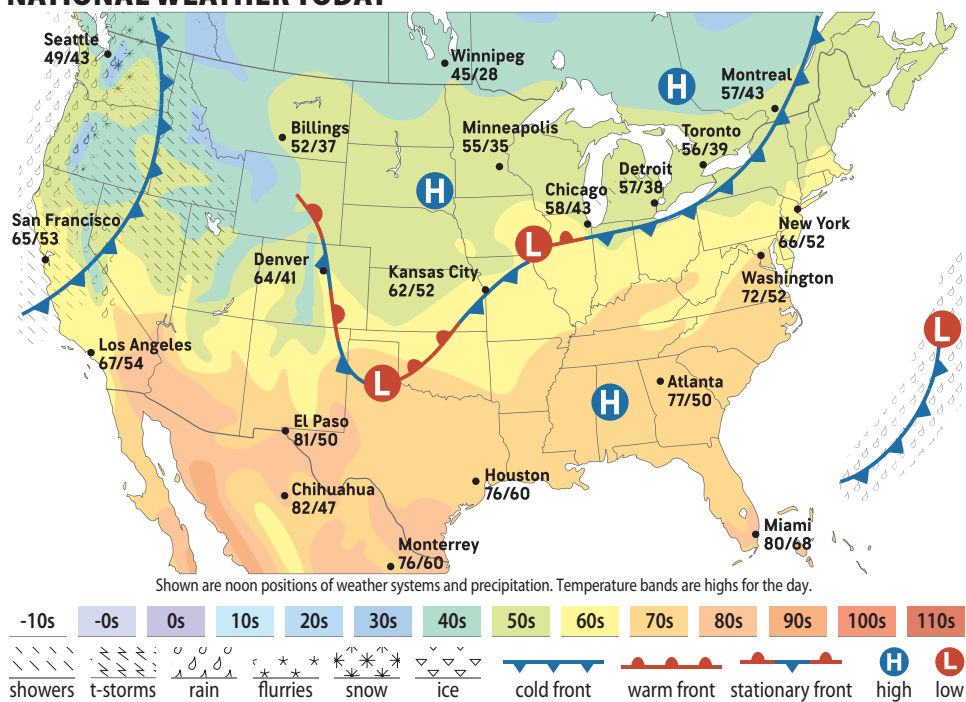
"Our objective is to leave it better than we found it," Anderes said.

NATIONAL EXTREMES

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

High 90° in Maricopa, Ariz. Low 7° in Stanley, Idaho

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



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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