

# Clatsop County asks ODOT for help deterring suicides

By ERICK BENGEL  
The Astorian

ASTORIA — Another fatal jump off the Astoria Bridge prompted Clatsop County to ask the Oregon Department of Transportation to consider ways to prevent more suicides.

In a letter to Bill Jablonski, ODOT district manager, the county board of commissioners requested the state partner with the county and local mental health professionals to assess a full range of prevention options.

On the afternoon of Jan. 12, James Neikes, 29, of Astoria, jumped off the bridge. He landed on the grass east of Suomi Hall. Still breathing when police officers arrived, Neikes was taken to Columbia Memorial Hospital, then flown to a Portland-area hospital, where he died.

“These deaths not only impact the individual families who experience the tragic loss of life, but also their community peers, co-workers, and bystanders,” according to the county’s letter, signed by Mark Kujala, the board’s chairman.

Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, the county’s mental health and substance abuse treatment contractor, said in a statement the agency supports “the implementa-

tion of deterrence measures to help prevent future loss of life by way of the bridge.

“Tools such as fencing and netting have proven to be highly successful in deterring and preventing tall bridges from being used to take one’s life,” the statement said, “and we would enthusiastically encourage ODOT to consider these measures with regards to the Megler.”

There have been several suicides off the Astoria Bridge in the past couple of decades, but the state does not keep an official count, said Don Hamilton, a department of transportation public information officer.

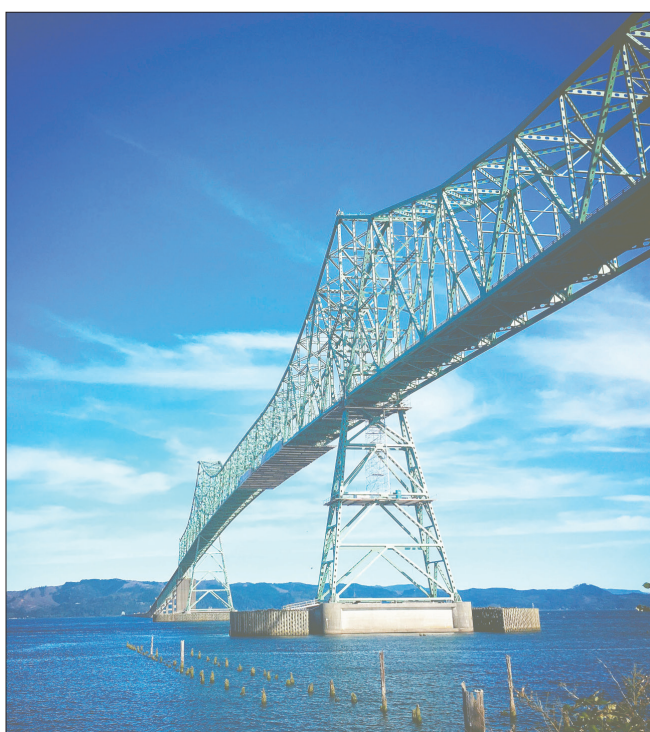
“We really don’t know,” he said.

The deaths have prompted difficult discussions among county leaders, social services agencies and law enforcement about mental health and substance abuse treatment on the northern Oregon Coast.

While Neikes was in the county jail, he had two meetings, including one on Jan. 11, with Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare counselors, according to Sheriff Matt Phillips.

“He never indicated to anyone that he was suicidal, at least not to us,” Phillips said. “So that was just a flat shock.”

On Jan. 12, Neikes had



Ed Hunt/For The Astorian

**A recent fatal jump off the Astoria Bridge has Clatsop County officials asking the Oregon Department of Transportation to consider ways to prevent more suicides.**

a virtual hearing in circuit court with Judge Cindee Matyas. Neikes was jailed 10 days earlier for two misdemeanors — second-degree criminal mischief and trespass — and two probation violations.

His attorney, Kristopher Kaino, noted at the hearing that cases such as Neikes’, where substance abuse and mental health issues interact, seem to be rising.

“We see more and more of these types of cases, and they become somewhat frustrating to try to help folks with, because I’m not sure what the best avenue is,” the attorney said.

Kaino said when he started criminal defense work in the 1990s, he might have seen half a dozen mental health-related cases a year.

“I’ve got three or four a month now with mental

health issues, minimum,” he said.

With few exceptions, people held in custody in Oregon have a statutory right to be brought to trial within 60 days unless they waive that right. But getting an in-depth psychological evaluation to see what services a person needs often takes longer.

Kaino said people in custody for nuisance-type offenses, such as those Neikes faced, often don’t want to wait if they can get out earlier, even if staying in jail would lead to a psychological evaluation that may help them, “which I get,” he said at the hearing.

Neikes said he was worried about getting out.

“I’m worried about how I’m going to — if I don’t have a phone or anything — I’m worried about how I’m going to get a job and just manage all this at the same time,” Neikes said. “And I’m not sure really what I’m going to do right now.”

Matyas dismissed the trespass charge and ordered Neikes complete 18 months supervised probation. She also ordered that he get assessed for potential placement in a specialty court — either the drug court or mental health treatment court.

“I’ll want to see you,

every week, and check in to see how you’re doing,” the judge told him.

She urged Neikes to stay connected with people — from the probation officer to services such as Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare’s Rapid Access Center.

“And I don’t want you to lose hope, OK?” Matyas told him.

“OK,” Neikes replied.

As the hearing ended, Matyas told him, “Look forward to seeing you in the future.”

“All right,” Neikes said. “Thank you.”

Before he was released from jail, Neikes asked for, and took, his afternoon medications, Phillips said. Neikes also asked for bus tokens; he needed to check in with his probation officer in Warrenton.

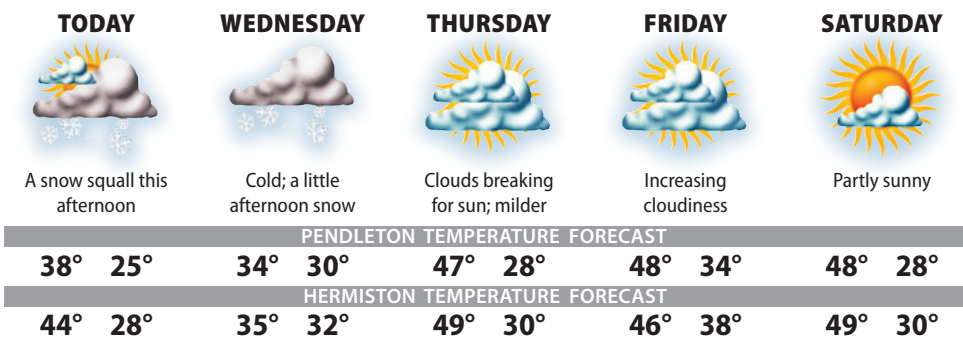
Neikes was laying plans to move into Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare’s sober living house in Warrenton, Phillips said.

“Those are all good signs that he was forward-thinking and looking to the future,” Phillips said.

Neikes left the jail at 2:05 p.m. About 15 minutes later, he was seen walking up the Astoria Bridge.

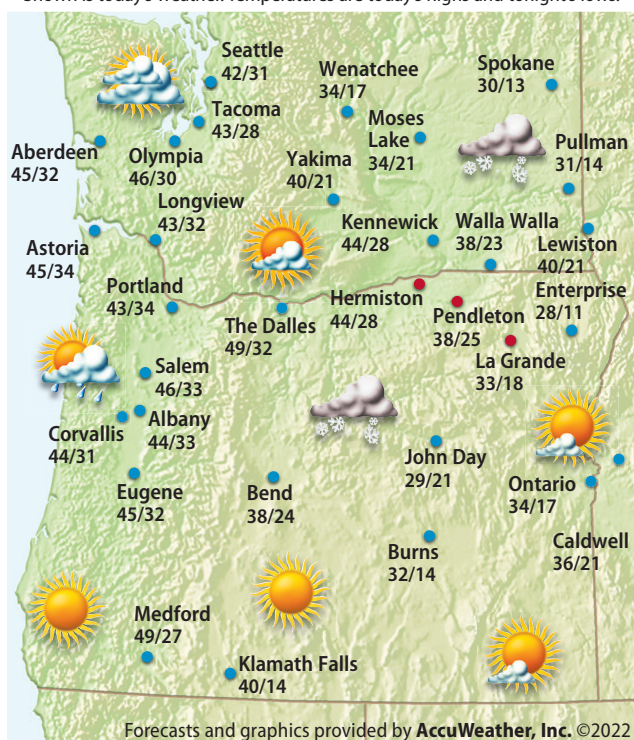
“James, he was a good kid. Nice kid. Very nice kid,” Kaino said. “I was sick when I heard he did what he did.”

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## OREGON FORECAST

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



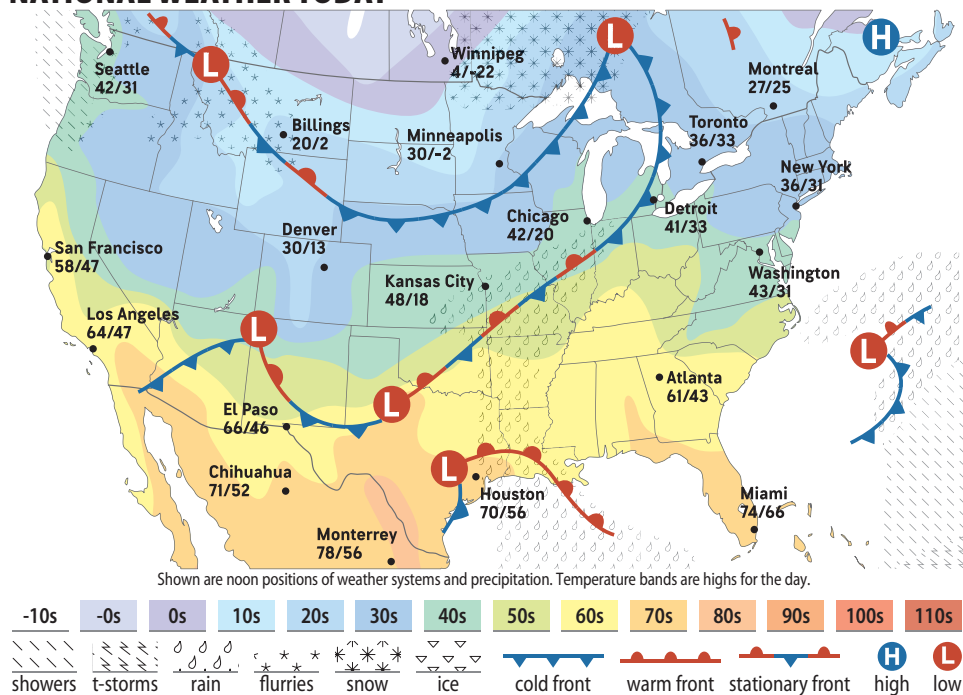
## ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	44°	36°	
Normals	44°	29°	
Records	70° (1995)	-15° (1950)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.06"		
Month to date	1.53"		
Normal month to date	1.54"		
Year to date	1.53"		
Last year to date	0.91"		
Normal year to date	1.54"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	49°	38°	
Normals	45°	29°	
Records	69° (1971)	-27° (1950)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.04"		
Month to date	0.93"		
Normal month to date	1.14"		
Year to date	0.93"		
Last year to date	0.59"		
Normal year to date	1.14"		
WINDS (in mph)			
Today	W 6-12	Wed. NW 4-8	
Pendleton	W 8-16	W 6-12	
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	7:17 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	5:01 p.m.		
Moonrise today	8:07 a.m.		
Moonset today	5:42 p.m.		
First	Full	Last	New
Feb 8	Feb 16	Feb 23	Mar 2

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)  
High 81° in Harlingen, Texas Low -31° in Antero Reservoir, Colo.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



# Deschutes County Sheriff's Office spending \$2M on take-home cars

By GARRETT ANDREWS  
The Bulletin

DESCHUTES COUNTY — The Deschutes County Sheriff's Office is spending more than \$2 million for a slew of new vehicles to ensure every patrol deputy has one to drive home.

The sheriff believes giving each patrol deputy a vehicle will add years to vehicle lifespans and better position deputies to respond to emergencies.

But Sheriff Shane Nelson's new vehicle plan bucks conventional wisdom about fleet budgeting, in which purchases are staggered so many vehicles don't end their useful lives at the same time and need to be replaced all at once. The change also may increase maintenance and other costs.

For fiscal year 2022, the sheriff's office ordered 32 vehicles at a total cost of \$1.1 million from Portland-area dealerships. The vehicles are 2021 and 2022 model Dodge Durangos, Chargers, Ram 1500s, Ford F-150s and F-250s and a Toyota Sienna, according to sale contracts The Bulletin obtained through public records requests.

Outfitting the vehicles with police electronics, partition cages, vinyl decals, lights and sirens cost the sheriff's office an additional \$1 million.

Prior to this year, the sheriff's office employed a system where two deputies shared one vehicle. The vehicle was in use 12 hours every day, which a sheriff's spokesperson said caused mileage to add up fast. Under that system, vehicles needed replacing every two to three years, according to sheriff's

Sgt. Jayson Janes.

Sheriff's patrol deputies work 12-hour shifts, four days on and four days off. The old plan involved deputies dropping off their car partner at home every four days. Janes stated that was fine as long as nothing happened at shift change

“There have been a number of times close to shift change that major crashes or other incidents occurred,” he said, “and the night shift deputies would be committed to the incident, so the oncoming day shift deputies had to find another way to come to work and find a vehicle so they could start their shift.”

The Bend Police Department does not have take-home cruisers, and it retires vehicles at 100,000 miles. Reaching that figure takes three to five years, according to Bend police Lt. Juli McConkey.

The police department grew its fleet by two vehicles in fiscal year 2021-22 and purchased 31 more to replace retired vehicles. That figure is twice as high as an ordinary year because the department purchased no vehicles during the first year of the pandemic, McConkey said.

Janes said the new sheriff's office vehicle plan is based on the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office's program, which it initiated in 2000. Janes said Clackamas officials found assigning every deputy a vehicle increased the life of the vehicles — from approximately 70,000 miles to approximately 120,000 miles — improved deputy efficiency, reduced response times to critical incidents and enhanced the visibility of law enforcement in the community.

Janes said Clackamas

County deputies reported feeling a sense of ownership toward their assigned vehicles, meaning they take extra care of it.

“Deputies can also be held individually accountable for failing to ensure their vehicles receive appropriate maintenance and minor repairs eventually reducing the vehicle's service life,” according to Janes.

If there are cost savings with the new plan, there also likely will be new costs.

Having twice as many cars on the street likely mean an increase to maintenance costs. And because deputies technically are working when driving their patrol vehicles, the sheriff's take-home vehicle system could lead to higher insurance costs and open the office to Fair Labor Standards Act claims. The sheriff's office's contract with the 911 service district requires the office to maintain in-car radios based upon the numbers of radios, meaning that bill could go up as well.

Even if the sheriff's office is able to extend the useful life of vehicles, 32 vehicles purchased at the same time likely all reach the end of their service lives at the same time. Public agencies typically replace the same small number of vehicles each time, so budgets are predictable and there are always fresh vehicles.

The sheriff's new vehicle plan also could be aimed at improving morale. Nelson has clashed openly with the deputy union. This summer, a fired former deputy prevailed in a federal civil rights claim and the county settled for a half-million dollars with a former deputy who accused Nelson of gender discrimination.

**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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