

Shadows of children stretch across the court Saturday, July 23, 2022, before practice at the Bilingual Basketball Camp at A.C. Houghton Elementary School in Irrigon. Yasser Marte/East Oregonian



EAST OREGONIAN

TUESDAY, JULY 26, 2022

146th Year, No. 93

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\$1.50

MORROW COUNTY



Alex Baumhardt/Oregon Capital Chronicle

Mayra Colin and her mom at their home in Boardman's West Glen neighborhood. Her tap water tested three times the safe limit for nitrate established by the EPA. She lives in the house with her parents and three sons.

County waits for state money to help with water crisis

By ALEX BAUMHARDT
Oregon Capital Chronicle

BOARDMAN — It's been more than two-and-a-half months since Mayra Colin found out the water coming from her kitchen tap in Boardman contained high levels of nitrates, which can cause serious health issues.

She's still waiting for a permanent fix.

"We're on the list to have a filter installed in the future," she said in a text message on Monday. "We have been provided with bottled water and more recently, water jugs weekly."

For three months, Morrow County officials have been testing the tap water of residents who rely on wells, and more than a month ago, the county commission declared an emergency over the contamination. The county is paying for bottled water deliveries, and a consortium of area businesses is paying for reverse-osmosis filters for homeowners in the area.

The state has provided some help — but no direct money, county officials said.

Jim Doherty, chair of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners wants the state to contribute \$4 million to expand nitrate testing in

the county, pay for reverse osmosis filter systems and help fund the digging of new wells.

That's how much the state recently gave to Klamath County to subsidize the cost of new wells for homes where they've gone dry.

Regional state lawmakers told Doherty to wait until a meeting of the Legislature's Emergency Board in September when county officials can request funds.

The contaminated water comes from the Lower Umatilla Basin, used by residents in Umatilla and Morrow County. It has become increasingly contaminated with nitrates during the last 30 years from farm fertilizers, animal manure and wastewater from the Port of Morrow and area food processors. Water that contains more than 10 parts of nitrates per million is unsafe to drink, according to the Federal Environmental Protection Agency.

Colin's water tested more than three times that.

About 1,300 households rely on private wells in Morrow County. So far, the county has tested nearly 270 wells for nitrates, with nearly half showing high levels, according to Ana Pineyro, communicable disease specialist at the Morrow County Health Department. The highest so far has tested more than six times the EPA limit. Many people who rely on wells in Morrow County are Latino, officials at the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality said.

They've largely been ignored by state and local lawmakers and officials — and agencies. State officials do not regulate water quality in private wells.

At least two state lawmakers have met with leaders at the Port of Morrow, with area food processors and large area farm owners. And in June, the Eastern Oregon Economic Summit, sponsored by the Port of Morrow, included a regional water tour through Morrow and



Phil Wright/East Oregonian

CANNABIS PRICES DROP

Pendleton stores see shift in what people buy

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton cannabis stores are weathering the latest trend in their industry — declining prices at the counter.

The Portland Business Journal has reported the median price for usable cannabis in Oregon is down 19% from last year. The drop is happening while inflation is driving up the costs of fuel and groceries nationwide.

Brandon Krenzler is co-owner of Kind Leaf, one of the four cannabis dispensaries operating in Pendleton. He said he sees a few factors at play in the price drop.

"Everyone is spending their paycheck on food and fuel," he said. "When people are spending more on gas, food, they don't have as much to spend on cannabis."

And then transportation costs, he said, "are killing everybody."

Kind Leaf co-owner Erin Purchase concurred and said it's not just prices at the pump and grocery stores that have been rising, but also utilities are costing more.

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Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

Top: Budtender Shayla Engstrom completes a sale Sunday, July 24, 2022, at Kind Leaf in Pendleton. Prices of cannabis products have been trending down statewide compared to last year. Local shops report they remain busy as customers shift to buying less expensive goods. Above: Chris Adams, morning supervisor of Thur's Smoke Shop, Pendleton, shows the strands of an indica hybrid on Monday, July 25, 2022.



Colorful pipes and bongs are on display Monday, July 25, 2022, at Thur's Smoke Shop, Pendleton. Yasser Marte/East Oregonian



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