

Tribe prepares for potential Ebola cases

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Although the Ebola virus has been sweeping through West Africa and cases have been reported in Texas and New York City, brought back to the United States by those who have traveled to the infected area, some might think that Grand Ronde is immune from preparing to handle a case of the dangerous disease.

Not so.

Tribal Emergency Operations Coordinator Jamie Baxter has held two meetings with Tribal personnel to ensure that if someone with Ebola visits Spirit Mountain Casino or comes to Grand Ronde, the Tribe will be prepared.

“The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde is participating with Oregon Public Health, our emergency medical services and hospital partners, and local public health to ensure we are prepared for an Ebola victim,” Baxter said.

“We feel our risk is low, but Ebola is an issue of national significance and we are committed to doing our part to ensure the safety of the Tribe and Oregon.”

So far there have been no Ebola cases in Oregon, but a Seattle-area nurse who returned from treating Ebola patients in West Africa was being monitored and voluntarily restricting her movements, the Associated Press reported on Oct. 23.

In a modern society, an infectious, deadly disease such as Ebola can be only a plane flight and car drive away from almost any community in the United States, including Grand Ronde.

The Tribe has held two meetings, on Friday, Oct. 17, and Thursday, Oct. 23, of its Health Care Incident Management Team and created an Incident Action Plan in case an Ebola victim is discovered locally.

Jeffrey Lorenz, executive director of Tribal Health Services, is designated as the incident commander



Jamie Baxter

and safety officer while Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor would be the public information officer during an

Ebola event.

Health & Wellness Accreditation Coordinator Jill Hafliger is the planning chief and Sharon Laddusaw, the Tribe’s Laboratory manager, is her deputy.

One of their objectives is to determine supplies the Tribal clinic has and what needs to be ordered within a week. The resources needed to prevent the spread of Ebola to medical personnel range from fluid-resistant gowns, particulate respirator face masks, infection control tape to disposable commode liners. There also is a need to identify an isolation room in the clinic in which to keep patients suspected of having the virus.

Once appropriate supplies are obtained, the clinic needs to schedule staff training in the proper donning and taking off of the protective gear.

The Tribe also is coordinating with the West Valley Fire Department and Salem Hospital and West Valley Medical Center in Dallas to coordinate a response to a potential Ebola patient.

Even if no Ebola cases ever reach Grand Ronde, the exercise will reap benefits for the Tribe, Baxter said.

“When all is said and done,” she said, “our Health and Wellness Clinic will have strengthened its infection control practices. We are also using this event as a teachable moment for teaching and training staff in the Incident Command System, how to do an Incident Action Plan and our Public Information officer will likely learn the Joint Information System.” ■

Bulb planting



Photo courtesy of Peter Moore

After singing a blessing song, Tribal Council member Jon A. George plants the first camas bulb in newly built raised beds at the Tribe’s Natural Resources Department on Wednesday, Oct. 15. The “Plants for People” project, between the Tribe and the Institute for Applied Ecology and funded by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, is an effort to grow culturally important plants with the goals of increasing the availability of culturally significant and native restoration plants and to determine the feasibility of a plant materials program in Grand Ronde. The beds will be used to provide a source of plant material to be transplanted into Tribal gathering areas. “The goal is to grow our own stock for restoration purposes rather than having to acquire them from an outside nursery,” said Natural Resources Department Manager Michael Wilson. In addition to camas, Yampah, redosier dogwood, Pacific willow, Lewis’ mockorange, Oceanspray and Pacific ninebark will be planted in the near future.

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