LUMBER

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forestland owners and wood product manufacturers, last year's fires in Oregon alone may have killed 15 billion board-feet of timber, enough to build 1 million homes.

The National Association of Home Builders, or NAHB, reports that between mid-April and mid-September, lumber prices soared more than 170%, adding $16,148 to the price of a typical new single-family home. Prices drifted lower at the start of fall, but they're on the rise again.

Mitchell of WFPA and Sara Duncan, spokeswoman for Oregon Forest and Industries Council, or OFIC, both said the lumber crisis was precipitated by several events.

Some Western states temporarily shut down construction work at the start of COVID-19, which in turn meant some mills had to shut down, creating a backlog.

New safety protocols within mills slowed production.

With Americans stuck at home under shutdowns, remodeling boomed and people used up much of the existing lumber supply at a time when mill production was curtailed.

Then wildfire season hit, wiping out millions of acres of timberland.

Now, demand for building materials is even higher from West Coast communities that are rebuilding after fires.

The lumber shortage has had a variety of impacts.

Construction associations have reported contractors are showing increased interest in alternative materials, such as metal framing.

Ryan Brennecke/EO Media Group, File

Experts say several factors have contributed to the lumber shortage: lockdown orders, new safety protocols, a spike in home remodeling and a massive wildfire season.

Forestry leaders say higher lumber prices don't mean timberland managers are hitting it big. Instead, experts say, many timber companies are facing tight margins because they had equipment and trees destroyed in fires, higher input costs and expenses associated with labor and reforesting.

Lumber shortages also have economic consequences for fire victims.

Many U.S. insurance policies limit the timeframe a person has to rebuild a home after a fire. With limited supplies of lumber and few contractors available, many survivors may not meet their insurance rebuilding deadlines.

Some state agencies are seeking to address this. In Oregon, for example, the state Division of Financial Regulation recently negotiated agreements with several insurance companies, pushing them to extend their timelines to at least two years after the date of loss.

"The weirdness of (2020) backed up the whole forestry system," said Mitchell of WFPA.

SBDC

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then in 2018 it served 227. The next year the total jumped to 352. Smith said that had much to do with EOU President Tom Insko's support for expanding student entrepreneurship.

Smith

Perkins

"The goal is to get into high school and let students know they can create jobs in Eastern Oregon," Smith said. "In 2002, we were geared up to expand the program, but COVID hit," which prompted Gov. Kate Brown to close schools statewide.

He also said some clients can skew the numbers.

The center serves Morrow County, where the Port of Morrow continues to thrive with businesses such as Amazon. A significant project there, Smith said, can make a spike in the center's data.

Gina Perkins, the center's assistant director, said the pandemic also meant fewer people were starting businesses in 2020, a trend that was statewide and not unique to Northeastern Oregon. But the center also served a much greater number of clients than the official stats reflect.

Typically, she explained, someone who contacts the center has to complete a client intake form to become an official client in the system. And 2020 was not typical. She estimated the center received perhaps 200 calls from people who were not official clients but "desperate business owners and entrepreneurs and needed immediate information, and we were not going to delay that by saying they needed to fill out the form."

Plenty of those calls, for example, were just 15 minute conversations to help people apply for federal aid.

She also said the pandemic has made business winners and losers.

"There were some restaurants who were well positioned either because they had takeout options or were able to pivot to provide takeout options," she said.

Other businesses also did well, such as greenhouses and plant nurseries. They experienced better sales, she said, perhaps because so many more people were having to stay home and opted to improve the beauty of their surroundings.

"So we have worked with a significant portion of clients who were looking to expand," Perkins said, "but our cautionary tale to them was to be cautious because when we return to normal — whenever that might be — you could see a reduction in sales."

That could be for various reasons, she said, including other businesses revving back up and creating more competition.

Businesses that closed during the pandemic, Perkins said, tended to already teeter on the cusp financially and had fewer resources and cash reserves to rely on.

Oregon has 19 small business development centers from the Oregon Coast to Ontario. Perkins said while the center in La Grande may be rural, it's one of the busiest in the state and can tap the other centers for expertise and information. The services the center provides also are free.

Perkins also emphasized the center has found local businesses that could have qualified for the pandemic relief loans from Business Oregon or even the city of La Grande, except the businesses were not able to put other basic financial statements.

"That was really unfortunate, and we would like to tell business people to please contact us," Perkins said. "Please, please, please. We can help them understand what those different financial statements are and who to interpret them. Without understanding where you are, without understanding cash flow, it's difficult to be successful in good times, let alone when the storm hits."

The U.S. Small Business Administration on Monday, Jan. 11, launched an online portal for eligible businesses to apply for Paycheck Protection Program loans as stipulated in the latest federal COVID-19 stimulus package. Perkins said that could give additional boost to some folks. She said there is a "significant increase to the amount of dollars available to restaurants, and they have been so particularly devastated."

COVID-19, she said, is like an ongoing blizzard, with moments of letting up only to begin blowing again. The Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center, she said, is here to help business owners weather the blizzard.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- To find out more about Oregon's small business development centers, visit oregonsbdc.org and click on the link for "centers." You also can contact the Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center at 541-962-1532.
- To find out more about federal small business COVID-19 resources, visit www.sba.gov.

U.S. will require all arriving passengers to get COVID-19 test

By MIKE STOBBE and DAVID KOENIG
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Anyone flying to the U.S. will soon need to show proof of a negative test for COVID-19, health officials announced Tuesday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention requirement expands on a similar one announced late last month for passengers coming from the United Kingdom. The new order takes effect in two weeks.

COVID is already widespread in the U.S., with more than 22 million cases reported to date, including more than 375,000 deaths. The new measures are designed to try to prevent travelers from bringing in newer forms of the virus that scientists say can spread more easily.

The CDC order applies to U.S. citizens as well as foreign travelers. The agency said it delayed the effective date until Jan. 26 to give airlines and travelers time to comply.

International travel to the U.S. has already been decimated by pandemic restrictions put in place last March that banned most foreigners from Europe and other areas. Travel by foreigners to the U.S. and by Americans to international destinations in December was down 76% compared to a year earlier, according to trade group Airlines for America.

Matthias Schrader/AP Photo

People walk with their luggage through a deserted check-in hall Dec. 26, 2020, at the airport in Munich, Germany. On Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2021, the U.S. government said it will require airline passengers entering the country to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test before boarding their flights. It will take effect Jan. 26.

The new restrictions require air passengers to get a COVID-19 test within three days of their flight to the U.S., and to provide written proof of the test result to the airline. Travelers can also provide documentation that they had the infection in the past and recovered.

Airlines are ordered to stop passengers from boarding if they don't have proof of a negative test.

"Testing does not eliminate all risk," CDC Director Robert R. Redfield said in a statement. "But when combined with a period of staying at home and everyday precautions like wearing masks and social distancing, it can make travel safer, healthier, and more responsible by reducing spread on planes, in airports, and at destinations."

The CDC order is "a reasonable approach" to reducing the risk of new variants from abroad entering the U.S., said Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University's school of public health.

It's likely that the recently identified version of the virus from the United Kingdom is "probably in every state or most states. This is going to do nothing for that," Jha said. So far, 10 states have reported 72 cases of the variant. But the new order may stop or diminish spread of other new versions of the virus, like one recently identified in South Africa.

"I can imagine other countries are going to impose (preflight testing) on us," he added.

Airlines have been lobbying for preflight testing to replace broad travel restrictions between the U.S. and the rest of the world.

In some cases, they have arranged for passengers to avoid quarantines after arrival by getting tested before their flight.

Testing "is key to unlocking international borders and safely reopening global travel," said Nicole Carriere, a spokeswoman for United Airlines, one of three major U.S. carriers that flies to Europe and Asia.

Others say the CDC order is unlikely to cause an immediate spike in international travel.

"People are being encouraged by their public health authorities to not travel, even domestically," said Henry Harteveldt, a travel analyst for Atmosphere Research Group.

He doesn't expect air travel to pick up until the summer when more people have been vaccinated.

3D Idapro Solutions lawsuit deadline approaching

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

STANFIELD — Settlement of a class action lawsuit on behalf of Stanfield residents against 3D Idapro Solutions is winding down.

Those who qualify for payment under the settlement have until Feb. 4 to submit a claim, according to documentation on the website of Liddle & Dubin P.C., a Detroit-based law firm handling the lawsuit.

3D Idapro Solutions operated a dehydration plant in Stanfield for several years before closing the plant in 2019. In 2017, a fire burned equipment at the plant that helped reduce the odors coming from rotting potato scraps there. The company replaced the fire-damaged scrubber and made other changes designed to reduce odor, but area residents continued to complain that strong odors from the plant were reducing their quality of life. Some told the city council the odors triggered physical responses, such as vomiting.

For more information, visit www.ldclassaction.com/class-action/3d-idapro-solutions-llc-settlement-2, email info@ldclassaction.com or call 1-800-536-0045.