

Oregon Guard bars unvaccinated members from unit drills

BY GARY A. WARNER

Oregon Capital Bureau

The Oregon National Guard is barring members who have not followed orders to be vaccinated against COVID-19 from taking part in military duties, officials confirmed Thursday, July 7.

The action could lead to termination or delays in pay and some benefits, according to a U.S. Department of Defense announcement. Continued refusal could lead to separation from the military altogether.

"This is a lawful order and is in line with other required vaccinations for readiness of the force," said Lt. Col. Stephen Bomar, spokesman for the Oregon National Guard. "As with other mandatory vaccinations, legitimate medical and religious exemptions will be acknowledged with respect, compassion and dignity."

The Department of Defense issued an order in August 2021 that all military personnel be vaccinated against COVID-19. The Army said the announcement this week would affect about 62,000 service members out of a total force of over 1

million soldiers.

About 97% of the 8,000 members of the Oregon National Guard have complied with the order by getting vaccinated, starting the vaccination process, or going through the administrative approvals to get exemptions or accommodations, Bomar said.

The Oregon National Guard declined to provide an exact number of members not in compliance or seeking waivers, citing privacy and appeals processes.

If 97% of the Oregon National Guard is in compliance, that would leave 3%, or about 240 members.

Bomar said decisions on exemptions are scheduled to be completed by Oct. 1.

"No adverse actions will take place against Guard members with pending or approved exemption requests," Bomar said.

If a service member's permanent medical exemption or religious accommodation request is denied they have the right to appeal that decision within 30 days.

If the appeal is unsuccessful,



File photo

The Oregon National Guard is barring members who have not followed orders to be vaccinated against COVID-19 from taking part in military duties, officials confirmed Thursday, July 7, 2022.

ful, the service member has the option of being vaccinated or being considered to have refused the order to be vaccinated.

"The specific number of days from receiving a final denial to being considered to have refused the vaccine is scheduled to come out in a future order," Bomar said.

Summer is the time when many National Guard units go through their mandatory two-

week training, often working with active-duty personnel. Ahead of those assignments, the U.S. Army announced plans to enforce vaccination deadlines that had been previously announced.

"Members of the Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve who have refused the lawful Department of Defense COVID-19 vaccination order without an approved or pending exemption may not partic-

ipate in federally funded drills and training and will not receive pay or retirement credit," according to the Army statement on Thursday.

The order has the biggest impact on the Army, which accounts for just under half of all uniformed personnel and 75% of all National Guard members.

The overwhelming majority of servicemembers have complied with the order. The Army has just over 1 million soldiers in service, with 480,000 on active duty. There are 336,000 National Guard members and 189,500 U.S. Army reservists.

"Maintaining readiness continues to be among the U.S. Army's highest priorities,"

said a statement from the U.S. Army command at the Pentagon near Washington, D.C. "We are fully committed to ensuring all soldiers are vaccinated against COVID-19."

The Pentagon said 40,000 National Guard members and 22,000 reservists were not yet in compliance with the order.

Since the pandemic spread to the United States in early 2020, the U.S. Defense Depart-

ment has worried about the impact of the virus on military readiness around the globe. Non-uniformed personnel were moved off-base at many installations. Troops went through quarantine periods before and after deployments overseas.

Initially, the military reported high-profile outbreaks, particularly in the contained spaces of Navy ships at sea. An outbreak in 2020 aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt infected over 1,000 sailors, about a quarter of the crew. One sailor died and the ship was quarantined for two months in Guam, with readiness maintained by the crew rotating between the land base and ship.

Overall, the Pentagon credits the policies as successful at maintaining military capabilities even as the 2.5-year-old pandemic has sickened 552.8 million people around the world, killing 6.35 million, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. In the U.S., more than 88.2 million infections have been reported and over 1 million people have died.

Mushrooms

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The measure legalizes the use of psilocybin, in designated "service centers," for purposes such as treating people 21 and older who are suffering from psychological trauma, addiction and other ailments.

The measure does not allow the retail sale of psilocybin, which makes it different from marijuana.

Councilor Joanna Dixon asked if there was any fiscal benefit to the city in allowing psilocybin.

City Manager Jonathan Cannon said the Oregon Health Authority, which is overseeing the new voter-approved law, will have four types of licenses, each of which will yield tax revenue. The four types of licenses are manufacturer, laboratory, facilitator, and service center.

According to an OHA slide show, service centers where people would take psilocybin will collect a 15% tax, payable to Oregon Department of Revenue.

"We are not eligible to implement any local taxes or fees on this so that we could collect anything," Cannon said. "I would say I'm not clear on whether or not we would get any sort of kick back, or whatever you want to

Baker County also considering ban on psilocybin

Baker County commissioners have scheduled two public hearings regarding a proposed ordinance banning psilocybin production and therapeutic use in unincorporated parts of the county as well as within the Unity city limits.

The hearings are scheduled for 9 a.m. on July 20, and 9 a.m. on Aug. 3, both in the Courthouse, 1995 Third St.

(Commissioners are acting city councilors for Unity, which has not had an elected city council for several years.)

call it from the state."

Cannon said if the city didn't get tax revenue, there is a possibility of creating some jobs and perhaps a facility that will generate some property tax revenue.

"But it would depend on which license type comes in and what that creates for the city," Cannon said.

Finance Director Jennifer Spencer said that when Oregon voters legalized recreational use of marijuana, cities and counties initially received tax revenue, but that the state government is keeping the majority of the revenue.

"So, while there may be a promise of tax revenue, I believe from the history of the marijuana side, that it will be short lived," Spencer told councilors.

Retail marijuana sales are not allowed in Baker City.

According to OHA, psilocybin "will only be administered to persons 21

years or older in licensed service center settings under the supervision of trained and licensed facilitators."

Such centers can't be within 1,000 feet of a school.

The Oregon Psilocybin Services section will start taking applications for psilocybin licenses on Jan. 2, 2023.

The measure does allow cities and counties to pursue either permanent bans or a two-year moratorium on psilocybin — either of which would have to be approved by voters in the jurisdiction — or to regulate the time, place and manner in which the drug is produced or used for therapeutic purposes.

Councilor Shane Alderson noted that another drug-related measure that Oregon voters passed in 2020 — Measure 110, which decriminalizes the possession of small amounts of many drugs, including heroin and

methamphetamine — is supposed to allocate much marijuana tax revenue to drug addiction treatment and prevention.

But he pointed out that the state has yet to allocate all of that money.

"There's still \$240 million sitting in Salem that hasn't been distributed," Alderson said.

In a staff report to councilors for Tuesday's meeting, Cannon listed four possible options.

- A permanent ban on psilocybin services. To do so, the city council would need to pass an ordinance that takes the matter to city voters, who would decide whether to approve the permanent ban.

- To qualify such a measure for the Nov. 8, 2022, election, the city would need to submit the measure to the Baker County Clerk's office by Sept. 8.

- A two-year moratorium on psilocybin services. This would follow the same process as a permanent ban, with a city ordinance and ballot measure.

- An ordinance regulating the time, place and manner of psilocybin services, which could, for example, restrict such services to commercial or other zones.

- Take no action and allow psilocybin to be regulated by the state.

Shooting

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The juvenile is charged with second-degree murder and unlawful use of a weapon, McClay wrote.

Police didn't say whether the female juvenile who was in the parking lot reported the shooting, or whether someone else called police.

Baker Technical Institute is at the northwest corner of the BHS campus, north of the gymnasium.

The Major Crime Team, which includes representatives from the Baker City Police, Baker County Sheriff's Office and Oregon State Police, is investigating.

Employees from the Oregon State Police crime lab worked throughout the early morning to collect evidence and process the scene.

The Baker School District sent out a notice, stating that "Activities scheduled on the main High School campus will continue. Please use the main entry of the building. Any activity scheduled in the BTI wing is cancelled until further notice."

According to the press release, anyone with information about the incident should call Baker County Dispatch at 541-523-6415.

Fire

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And in the heat that has finally arrived, pushing temperatures to triple digits at lower elevations, and humidity levels below 20%.

"It's definitely drying out," Goodrich, fire staff officer for the Willowa-Whitman National Forest, said on Tuesday, July 12, the hottest day of the year in Baker City, with a high of 98 at the Baker City Airport.

"Things have changed quite a bit in the last two weeks."

Crouch, the fire mitigation specialist for the Bureau of Land Management's Vale District, concurred with his fellow federal fire manager.

"The drying is happening fast," Crouch said on Tuesday.

That's especially so in Baker County and points south, he said.

The lush crop of grass, including invasive cheatgrass, that grew this spring has already dried in much of Malheur County, and the trend is moving north, Crouch said.

Conditions are still comparatively damp, and the fire danger somewhat lower, to the north, he said.

After the soggy spring, the Baker City Airport has been relatively parched, measuring just 0.05 of an inch of rain since June 6.

Thunderstorms that doused other parts of the region mostly missed Baker City.

Meacham, by contrast, has had 3.12 inches of rain during that span, most of it coming from a couple of June cloud-bursts.

Lightning starts small fires

Lightning from a series of storms that started Tuesday afternoon, July 12, and continued into Wednesday morning ignited several small fires in Northeastern Oregon.

As of Wednesday afternoon, the Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center — bmidc.org — in La Grande was reporting these blazes:

- Spool Cart campground area, 15 miles southwest of La Grande, 0.1 acre
- Thief Valley Area east of North Powder, 0.25 acre
- Twin Lakes area, west side of Elkhorns, 0.1 acre
- Ladd Canyon, 0.25 acre
- Sheep Creek, 18 miles southwest of Baker City, 0.2 acre
- Sawmill Gulch near Sumpter, 0.1 acre
- West Eagle Creek, 0.2 acre
- Lawrence Creek, 17 miles west of Baker City, 0.1 acre

The Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton has recorded 1.33 inches since June 6.

The Willowcreek fire, which started on private property north of Vale on June 28, rapidly spread to about 40,000 acres, propelled by gusty winds on a day when temperatures reached 100 degrees in north Malheur County.

That fire shows the potential for fast-moving fires given a combustible combination of weather conditions, Crouch said.

Yet that blaze, which is still

under investigation, is also a conspicuous anomaly.

The Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center at the Union County Airport, which oversees much of Northeastern Oregon — although not Malheur County — has recorded just 17 fires this year, which burned a scant 2.7 acres.

Although the fire danger rating is high on BLM ground, Crouch noted that the agency has yet to impose restrictions on campfires.

Nor has the Forest Service.

That's in sharp contrast to 2021, when a dry spring resulted in an abnormally early start to fire season and to its associated regulations on public lands in Northeastern Oregon.

This year, Crouch said, "those late spring rains put a lot of moisture in the ground and greened things up."

Both Crouch and Goodrich agree that the 2022 fire season is more typical for the region, in that the fire danger, rather than rising to extreme levels even before the summer solstice, is beginning to rise only as July nears its middle.

"It feels more like a typical season from the 1990s or early 2000s," Goodrich said.

Between 1999 and 2010, about 80% of the wildfires on the Willowa-Whitman started between July 15 and Aug. 15, he said.

Although he said statistics haven't been updated for the past five years, he suspects that there have been more fires in the first half of July than in the past, and that the fire season has extended a bit later into

late summer and early fall.

Fire danger remains moderate in most of Northeastern Oregon.

The energy release component, an estimate of how fast a fire would spread based on moisture levels in fuels, is below average in each of the six geographic zones that the Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center monitors.

The numbers, which briefly went above average in late June before dropping again due to widespread rain in

early July, have been rising again for the past several days.

Goodrich said the few lightning-sparked fires reported earlier in July burned sluggishly, generally not spreading beyond the drip line of the tree that was struck by lightning.

He expects fires through the rest of the summer will be more energetic.


In addition to the increasing fire danger, Goodrich and Crouch are tracking weather patterns that bring thunder-

storms to the region.

That's a crucial factor, since lightning in most years ignites about 80% of the fires on public land. (The percentage is generally lower on private land, where human-caused fires are more common.)

In the meantime, Crouch said the grasses that and sagebrush that fed the Willowcreek fire will continue to be a source of easily burned fuel.

"Our fuel loading in the grasses is much higher than it was last year," he said.



End of life Celebration for

Ritha M. Wilcox

Long-time Baker City resident and Baker High School Alumni

To be held

July 23, 2022

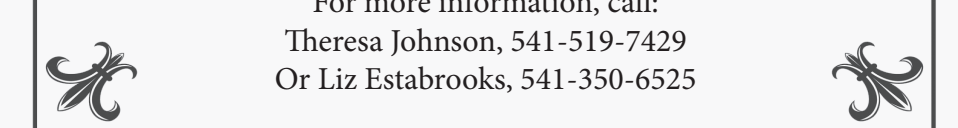
Balm Creek Reservoir

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All are welcome

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