

Self-service fueling allowed in Oregon through April 11

By Les Zaitz
Oregon Capital Bureau

As the new coronavirus took hold in Oregon, workers who perform one of life's most routine jobs — pumping gas — started to panic.

In Pacific City, visitors in town for the first weekend of spring break swarmed one service station, prompting employees to walk off the job and forcing the station to close.

Across the state, service station owners started reporting growing fear and dwindling work forces.

"We have employees that are sick, uncomfortable about coming to work and staying home to take care of their kids," one station owner wrote in an email shared by the Oregon Fuels Association. "This is creating a manpower shortage."

Company after company in the early days of the pandemic's spread in Oregon reported challenges keeping stations open.

On Saturday, Oregon State Fire Marshal Jim Walker suspended the state's ban on self-service fueling, an order in place through at



Aaron Roark pumps gas at the Sinclair station in Pendleton. Self-service fueling is allowed throughout Oregon through April 11.

EO Media Group file photo

least April 11.

Rudy Owens, a public affairs specialist in Walker's office, said a developing "critical shortage of workers" led to the decision, made in collaboration with Gov. Kate Brown. He said there was growing worry that essential workers who need to drive to get to work, such as health care workers and police and medics,

would run out of places to fuel up.

"In certain parts of Oregon, if attendants are unavailable, there is no gas," Owens said. "Our hope is this is going to be very short term and that there is no harm."

Owens said Oregonians who elect to pump their own gas have to take the same precaution they do with

touching any other potentially contaminated service, whether it's a grocery store cart or the door to a store. He said sanitizing and hand washing will be essential because station workers won't be able to clean pump nozzles after every customer's use.

Mike Freese, a lobbyist for the Oregon Fuels Association, said that station own-

ers would use attendants to clean equipment as possible "but there is no assurance the equipment will get sanitized after every use."

The association approached Brown's office on Thursday, March 19, asking that the state's ban be lifted.

"Many gas attendants are unable to come to work due to sickness, access to children issues (with children at home) as well as the plethora of issues people are facing right now," Freese and his lobbying partner, Danelle Romain, wrote in an email to two of Brown's staffers. "This is an emergency."

The following day, the association shared reports it was getting from station owners across the state. The reports came before state authorities started listing a rapidly increasing number of Oregonians testing positive for COVID-19.

One company with 24 stations said one-third of its workers were off duty and that "employees are unwilling to continue face-to-face, hand-to-hand contact with customers."

An executive with

another company with 21 stations reported, "My managers are extremely concerned about getting people who are willing and feel safe enough to come to work." The executive said one-fourth of its work force was off sick.

"We have one very busy station. We have only three employees. They are all sick," another owner wrote.

In another location, "We have five employees, four of them called sick and the fifth was not comfortable to work out of concern for himself and his grandmother at home. We ended up closing the station."

Romain said Saturday that stations have already closed in several cities, including Lake Oswego, Eugene, Government Camp, Clatskanie and Hood River.

Oregon and New Jersey are the only states to ban self-service gasoline. Oregon, however, allows exceptions. In 2016, residents in rural counties with populations under 40,000 gained the right to pump their own fuel at night. Last year, they were allowed to fuel anytime.

Oregon attorney general targets four stores for excessive price hikes of essentials during outbreak

By Jake Thomas
Oregon Capital Bureau

The Oregon Department of Justice is accusing four convenience stores of price-gouging on sales of toilet paper, bottled water and surgical masks.

The agency on Tuesday issued cease-and-desist letters to two stores in Salem and one each in Keizer and Portland that said they were charging an "unconscionably excessive price" for goods that have been in high demand during the coronavirus outbreak.

Last week Gov. Kate Brown declared an "abnormal disruption to the Oregon marketplace" because of the coronavirus pandemic. The declaration followed reports of stores selling out of toilet paper and hand sanitizer or selling these and other items at exorbitant prices.

Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum can use the state's consumer protection laws against companies that increase the price of essential products by 15% or more. Essential products include food, fuel, water, cleaning products and medical supplies and services.

Since setting up a price-gouging hotline on March 16, the Justice Department received over 100 phone calls and complaints, according to spokeswoman Kristina Edmunson.

The letters don't specify how much stores were charging for essential goods. They notify each store that the department has received one or more complaint about them charging excessive prices and orders them to stop. The letters also warn that the attorney general may seek civil penalties of up to \$25,000 per violation and require businesses to pay restitution to injured consumers.

Of the letters issued by the depart-



Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum

Capital Bureau file photo

ment, two were sent to 7-11 stores for charging excessive prices for surgical masks. One store is located at 4715 NE Columbia Blvd. in Portland. The other is located at 2002 Lancaster Drive NE in Salem.

Phone numbers listed for each of the 7-11 stores were not functional. A message sent to an email address for media inquires on 7-11's corporate website Thursday afternoon was not immediately answered.

Another letter accused the AM-PM convenience store at 501 Lancaster Drive NE in Salem of selling excessively priced bottled water. No one answered the phone at a number for the store listed online, and the call did not go to voicemail.

A fourth letter was sent to Keizer Food Market at 4495 River Road N., for excessively raising its price of toilet paper. Luke Peca, store manager, denied the accusation.

"We don't even sell toilet paper,"

he said.

Edmunson said in an email that the department has followed up on many complaints by contacting the business or sending out an investigator. She said that businesses often don't understand the state's price-gouging laws and will lower prices after being contacted.

"If we are not satisfied, we will follow-up with a cease-and-desist letter," she said. "We have been monitoring the complaints closely and will probably be sending more out."

The declaration also applies to online retailers. Rosenblum was one of 33 state attorneys general who signed a letter sent on Wednesday to Amazon, Craigslist, eBay, Facebook and Walmart warning them that they aren't exempt from state price-gouging laws. The letter cited one incident where a two-liter bottle of hand sanitizer was sold online for \$250 on Craigslist.

Brown says goal of stay-home order is to maintain social distancing and avoid crowds

By Dick Hughes
For the Oregon Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown said the far-reaching executive order she issued this week should not stop immediate families from motoring for relaxation or driving to a trailhead, as long as they maintain proper social distancing while hiking.

"The goal here is to limit your social circles. The goal is to stay away from crowds. The goal is to maintain social distancing," Brown said of Oregon's efforts to stem the spread of COVID-19.

Oregon State Police Superintendent Travis Hampton noted that most campgrounds and boat ramps are closed, so Oregonians and visitors should research their plans before heading out. In a letter sent to all police agencies in Oregon, he emphasized that Brown's order was not close to martial law. People don't need documentation showing they are traveling legally to or from work or other permitted activities.

"There are no curfews and a person's movements are not restricted under the Governor's Executive Order," Hampton wrote. "While details are offered in the order relating to social distancing, specific business closures and non-essential social gatherings, [Oregonians'] movements are generally unrestricted."

Motorists should not be pulled over under suspicion of violating the executive order. "If, however, you are commit-

ting a traffic violation or crime that would be enforced independent of the order, you may be stopped, like any other day," he wrote.

In her executive order, Brown said the need for a strong "Stay Home, Save Lives" directive was reinforced by seeing that crowds had gathered last weekend at the Oregon Coast, Smith Rock State Park, Columbia River Gorge and other places in defiance of social distancing guidelines.

State parks, public and private campgrounds, and many other recreation sites now are closed, either under the governor's order or voluntarily. Oregonians are allowed to go outside for recreation so long as they maintain appropriate social distancing — at least six feet, except for family members living in the same residence.

Oregon's beloved ocean beaches are not closed, but getting there — legally — could be problematic.

"The state parks closure doesn't impact the ocean shore, but it does close all state park-managed parking lots and beach accesses," said Liz Merah of the Governor's Office. "The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department has the authority to close the beach temporarily for health reasons."

And that department said in the FAQs posted online, "If people don't get the message that clumping up and overwhelming local areas is a bad idea, we'll have to revisit the decision to leave all beaches open."

State will release more COVID-19 data making Oregon's response more transparent

By Dick Hughes
For the Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon officials will begin releasing more data about the march of the coronavirus pandemic.

Gov. Kate Brown told reporters during a conference call on Wednesday that she has ordered the Oregon Health Authority to share "all COVID-19 information with the public that does not compromise patient privacy." That includes more

exact age ranges of patients, hospitalization status and the number of available hospital beds and ventilators for COVID-19 patients.

Legislators, journalists and others have asked repeatedly for data that track the current situation. The OHA only had been releasing cumulative data from Jan. 24, plus daily updates on confirmed cases, testing and deaths.

Oregon House Republicans sent Brown a letter responding to her state-

wide executive order issued Monday that closes more businesses and imposes greater social distancing restrictions.

"While we broadly support this action, we also believe it comes with an obligation on behalf of the Governor's office to ensure this order is bolstered with additional access to information in order to be carried out in a clear and transparent manner," the letter said.

The state representatives asked that Brown provide

legislators and the public with "a clear data-based standard" for making changes to the executive order and "additional information on health care system capacity, with regular updates on COVID-19 hospitalizations including patient acuity data and recovery rates to ensure executive and legislative actions are responsive to maintaining systemwide resilience and readiness."

"With this, we urge an approach that continues to protect public health while

limiting harm to the economy, by communicating with the public that these are temporary measures that will be re-evaluated within a clear framework as circumstances change," the letter said.

On Wednesday, Brown announced that Oregon hospitals had 2,028 available non-ICU beds, 394 available

ICU beds and 608 available ventilators. "And there will be more information coming soon," she said.

State officials report that COVID-like symptoms make up a small proportion of visits to hospital emergency rooms, but the percentage has been increasing.

Your Rural Family Health Clinic



Grant County HEALTH Department
528 E. Main, St. E.
John Day

Monday - Thursday
7am - 6pm
Friday 8am - 5pm

Appointments available

Call and schedule your appointment today!
888-443-9104
or 541-575-0429

TOLL FREE 5181015-1

Services Provided:

- Primary Care
- Acute Care
- Women's Health Exams
- Men and Children Exams
- Immunizations
- Family Planning
- Contraception
- Pregnancy Testing & Referrals
- HIV Testing & Referrals
- Cocoon
- WIC
- High Risk Infants
- Maternity Case Management

Grant County Health Department does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, or age in admission, treatment, or participation in its programs, services and activities, or in employment.



AGCO PARTS **MASSEY FERGUSON** **HESSTON**

Robbins Farm Equipment

3850 10th St. Baker City 541-523-6377
62302 Pierce Rd. La Grande 541-963-6577
1160 S Egan Burns 541-573-6377
86312 Christmas Valley Hwy. Christmas Valley 541-576-2160

5181015-1



A MAN WAKES UP in the morning after sleeping on... an advertised bed, in advertised pajamas.

He will bathe in an **ADVERTISED TUB**, shave with an **ADVERTISED RAZOR**, have a breakfast of **ADVERTISED JUICE**, cereal and toast, toasted in an **ADVERTISED TOASTER**, put on **ADVERTISED CLOTHES** and glance at his **ADVERTISED DESK**. He'll ride to work in his **ADVERTISED CAR**, sit at an **ADVERTISED DASH** and write with an **ADVERTISED PEN**. Yet this person hesitates to advertise, saying that advertising doesn't pay. Finally, when his non-advertised business is going under, **HE'LL ADVERTISE IT FOR SALE.**

Then it's too late.

AND THEY SAY ADVERTISING DOESN'T WORK? DON'T MAKE THIS SAME MISTAKE

Advertising is an investment, not an expense. Think about it!

Blue Mountain Eagle
MyEagleNews.com

Don't get left behind, call today! Kim Kell 541-575-0710

5181017-1