The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Isopropyl alcohol on the shelves at Grant County's Emergency Operations Center at the Grant County Regional Airport.

Spike

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The hospital has a 14-day supply of PPE on hand, which includes roughly 1,000 N95 masks, 10,000 procedure masks, 100 face shields and an "adequate" supply of gloves, isolation gowns and hand sanitizer, she said.

Lindsay said the health department has one full-time contact tracer and an employee who is training that will work full time as a contact tracer or, should the county not see an influx of cases, work on other COVID-19-related tasks.

There are contact tracers from the state, she said, and counties have volunteered to contact trace for other counties seeing more cases.

"Between what we currently have, what we're adding and what is available from the state and other counties," she said, "I feel like we're in a very good spot compared to other counties."

While the county handles contact tracing, the hospital staff are ready to step in as contact tracers for the Health Department, Rand said.

Lindsay said, without a cure or a vaccine, it is essential to be thoughtful about social distancing as the state opens back up.

"We've opened up, and in Grant County, we haven't seen an increase in cases, and that's great," she said. "And I hope that that continues, but we are seeing an increase in cases, and Grant County isn't immune."

The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Grant County Health Department workers prepare COVID-19 test kits during the county's curbside testing last month. County health officials confirmed last week that Grant County has the capacity to test 500 people.

EOC

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Orchard said Oregon public meetings law anticipates conducting public business in actual emergencies.

According to the approved meeting minutes from March 13, 2019, the court approved a motion to give the county judge discretion to approve the purchase of previously budgeted items.

Grant County Judge Scott Myers said the March 2019 motion does not apply to the EOC's out-of-court purchases.

"(The expenditure) has to be pre-approved," he said. "Their budget has to be pre-approved for the purchase before they could even bring that to me."

The EOC was budgeted $23,564 for materials and services, according to Grant County Court Treasurer Julie Ellison. The EOC spent $91,791 in supply procurements, according to a document Dobler submitted in court May 27.

Hamsher told the Eagle about $5,000 of the procurements was for personal protective equipment for the courthouse and that Dobler emailed invoices to a commissioner who would print them and circulate them for signature among the court members.

Preston said it appeared Hamsher and Palmer were getting compensated from both the county and through state reimbursement the county will be receiving in the next few weeks.

Hamsher said he and Palmer both have been paid for only 13.3 hours per week from the county, and the hours they have been putting in at the EOC have been volunteer hours.

The reason the hours were tracked and reported to the state of Oregon's Coronavirus Relief Fund was so the county could get reimbursed for wages that went toward the county's coronavirus response.

"The wages for those weeks will all be reimbursed to the county," he said. "That will help on the budget for any other shortfalls we have this year."

Hamsher said, between he and Palmer, the county will be reimbursed for 166 hours.

"That's substantial," he said.

Hamsher said the CARES Act reimbursements are for actual costs incurred while responding to COVID-19 — which includes wages for the health department and the economic development office.

Another citizen, Austin resident Billie Jo George, said the EOC is worried about "petty stuff" while the county faces a potential surge in COVID-19 cases on the level of what Union County is experiencing after a recent outbreak sent their numbers from single digits to over 200.

"There is a large group of Hispanics from Washington in here picking mushrooms commercially," she said. "And they're going in your grocery store, and they're going in your gas stations and restaurants. Everyone of those license plates is from Washington, so get prepared, because it's coming to you, and the boys down at the Forest Service choose to do absolutely nothing about it."

She said worrying about radios, laptops and other high-ticket items is "minor" compared to the threat of a potential outbreak mushroom pickers pose.

While health officials have noted minority and migrant communities have disproportionately been impacted by the virus, state and county health authorities tied the 240 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Union County to the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Island City.

The church held services in April and May, despite Brown's executive orders limiting gatherings of over 25 people, and recently held a wedding and a graduation ceremony with more than 100 people at each event.

Palmer said the county cannot keep out-of-state travelers out of the county and that all the county can do is prepare for an influx of cases.

"We cannot tell people that they cannot come through our county, and we certainly cannot restrict them because they are Hispanic or anything else," he said. "That would be very discriminatory."

Palmer said he understands that migrant mushroom pickers are "high risk."

Myers said Hamsher brought up the risk of the spread of the virus that commercial mushroom pickers can bring to the county during a court session last month. Hamsher said the county court does not issue mushroom permits or enforce laws on federal land.

However, he did say the county purchased radios that could help if the county saw an increase in cases because some positive cases could be in areas where there is no cellphone service. He said first responders and fire departments across Grant County now have radios, and they purchased items for the next emergency, so the county is prepared.

"We ended up buying more stuff for emergency management that'll be able to be used — God forbid — for the next emergency down the road," Hamsher said.

Preston said she supports Search and Rescue, but her concern was people involved with SAR used the pandemic to purchase equipment that the county did not need.

"The emergency rescue people took advantage of the COVID-19 situation and bought a bunch of stuff that they didn't really need at this time," she said. "Don't misunderstand me, I realize they'll probably use it in the future, but I don't like the methods that they used to get what they wanted."

Seth Klingbeil, EOC staffer and SAR volunteer, who attended the meeting via teleconference, said SAR had not received any equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Palmer said emergency management needed equipment and will be reimbursed 100%, not at local taxpayer expense, and the county can use the supplies in future emergencies.

"It was 100% the wisest way to purchase and spend money and to be prepared for this emergency and any future emergencies," he said.

Preston told the court she has heard both of the commissioners say in the past that they have moved forward to build SAR, and Palmer's comment that the EOC took advantage of CARES Act reimbursements to purchase emergency equipment confirmed what she always believed.

Hamsher said the county now has software for federal reimbursements, and he pointed to the Canyon Creek Complex fire and the floods last year and how the county missed out on thousands of dollars in refunds.

Palmer gave an analogy to justify the purchases to Raines and Preston.

"When your house catches on fire, it's a little late to buy a fire truck, purchase all the equipment to go on your firetruck, and then train your firefighters and then ask them to come out to your house when it's on fire," he said. "And it's the same thing with an ambulance, a little too late."

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