

Unopened boxes of unused surgical gloves and masks seen in Bend landfill

By SUZANNE ROIG
The Bulletin

BEND — As Bend resident Ryan Reid tossed his construction trash in the Knott Landfill Recycling Center on Thursday, Feb. 3, he couldn't believe what he saw: boxes of unopened medical masks, gloves and gowns, some still in their original packaging being dumped.

Reid thought to himself about all the people who have died and gotten sick from the COVID-19 pandemic and how some of this personal protective equipment could have been used.

St. Charles Health System confirmed late Thursday that it had its vendor dump the unopened boxes of personal protective equipment. Reid also confirmed with a landfill operations supervisor that St. Charles sent the supplies.

Chad Centola, the Deschutes County solid waste director, said a vehicle came in Thursday afternoon and dumped an undisclosed amount of boxes, some still attached to wooden pallets, of personal protective equipment in the landfill.

Early in the pandemic, when personal protective equipment like masks, gowns and gloves were in short supply, the hospital scoured its sources for any and all personal protective equipment it could acquire, Lisa Goodman, St. Charles Health System spokeswoman, said in an email.

"In early 2020, St. Charles and other hospital systems around the



Submitted Photo

Ryan Reid, a Bend resident, was at the Knott Landfill Recycling Center on Thursday, Feb. 3, 2022, and saw unopened boxes of hospital gowns, N95 masks and gloves that had been thrown away.

country were faced with a critical shortage of personal protective equipment," Goodman said. "We ordered whatever (personal protective equipment) was available, including certain substandard types of (it) we would not have previously considered using."

But as the supply chain improved, this equipment got moved to the back of the supply warehouse and put in storage by a third-party vendor, Goodman said.

The idea was it would be put to use only in an emergency.

Even as the highly contagious

omicron variant circulates in Central Oregon communities, increasing illness and hospitalization, that day never came.

A year later, the hospital realized it wouldn't need this equipment, so it offered it to organizations, schools, counties, construction firms and religious groups, Goodman said.

"The third party responsible for liquidating this (personal protective equipment) by donation or sales made the decision to discard (it) after many efforts to place it, including shipping it to developing countries," Goodman said. "While we regret

this (personal protective equipment) couldn't be re-homed, we feel a strong responsibility to provide our caregivers with the safest and highest quality both for their protection and our patients."

Reid, outraged by the waste and not knowing the background, contacted several media outlets.

"It was pretty shocking and a gross amount of waste," Reid said. "I have friends in the medical field who still have to reuse masks. There is still a pandemic and high value material was thrown away."

University reports surge in COVID cases

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — Like every other entity in Oregon, Eastern Oregon University has not been immune to the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases caused by the omicron variant.

The university saw a significant rise in off-campus cases in January, while its numbers among on-campus individuals stayed rather steady.

Eastern Oregon University has totaled 251 total positive COVID-19 cases this academic year, since the school began tracking data at the start of July. Of that total, 152 positive tests came from off-campus students, 45 positive tests accounted for employees and 40 positive tests were from on-campus students.

From Dec. 6 to Jan. 1, there were 16 cases among on-campus students. By the end of January, that total rose to 40. The rate among employees at Eastern Oregon University saw a similarly mild increase, rising from 22 to 45.

Cases among off-campus students saw a significant rise in the same time frame, jumping from 44 cases to 152.

The university had several high points in January, mirroring national and statewide trends as the emergence of the omicron variant led to an increase in cases. Eastern recorded a record-high case count for a single day on Jan. 4, tallying 23 positive cases. The school recorded 21 cases on Jan. 10 and 14 on Jan. 25. Those are the three highest single-day case counts since Eastern started tracking



Eastern Oregon University/Contributed Photo

Students walk to class at Eastern Oregon University in this undated photo.

its COVID-19 data this school year.

The previous single-day high was seven cases on Sept. 13.

Eastern's testing has continually increased throughout the 2021-22 school year, reaching 2,425 total tests through Feb. 1. The 251 total positive tests result in a 10.4% positivity rate. The measurement had stayed steady around 5% through most of the fall, peaking toward the end of January

and into February.

The university tracks its off-campus isolations and quarantines, a number that has stayed relatively low. The school tracked three off-campus quarantines from Jan. 4-9 and two from Jan. 12-18.

Eastern has 50 isolation rooms available on campus in case of infection, but the university has never come close to running out of space

in that regard. From Jan. 5-10, 45 out of the 50 spaces were available, the lowest mark that Eastern has reached since the dashboard started tracking data at the start of July.

The vaccination rate among on-campus students stands at 75.7%, with a 24.2% exemption rate. For on-campus employees, 80.1% are vaccinated and 17.7% received an exemption.

Threats lead to arrest of Powell Butte boy

By JOE SIESS The Bulletin

POWELL BUTTE — Police arrested a seventh-grade boy at Powell Butte Community Charter School after linking him to a number of threats made against staff and students at the school earlier this week.

Crook County Sheriff's Office deputies were dispatched to the charter school Wednesday, Feb. 2, after multiple threats of violence were left on the school's phone system.

The messages prompted a lockdown at both the school and the Powell Butte Christian Church next door, but an investigation by local deputies and the FBI did not initially turn up anything suspicious. After more messages were left on the school's phone system Thursday, authorities were able to link the messages to the seventh grader as classes resumed.

The student was searched, but no weapons were found. After deputies searched the student's home, they turned up enough evidence to arrest him for calling in the threats, the sheriff's office said in a statement released Thursday. The boy was taken to the Juvenile Detention Center in Deschutes County.

School officials said Friday that the seventh-grader had masked his threatening calls to the school to avoid getting caught. However, the second call the student made led to his arrest.

"The sheriff's department told us, the second (call) made it easier for them to find out who it was, connect all the dots... and make the arrest," said Jason Carr, communications director for the Crook County School District.

The first call was not made from a number that authorities could trace, Carr said.

Carr said the seventh-grader could have used a number of methods to make a call that would be difficult to trace, including the use of a burner phone, or by using a number of applications available on the web.

Carr said the school district is cooperating with the sheriff's office on the matter, but has not been in contact with any other law enforcement agencies.

"We are confident, and so is the Sheriff's Office, that the situation has been resolved," Carr added. "There is no lingering threat to the Powell Butte Community Charter or any of the other schools in the school district."

Crook County Undersheriff James Savage said the FBI is still assisting with the investigation, but in a support capacity.

Savage declined to release information about the suspect or the nature of the evidence recovered in the investigation at this time.

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