

# Vaccine: State mandate poses problems for fire dept.

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from doing that.”

The ruling from the governor gives cities that use firefighters as health care workers until Oct. 18 to come into compliance. The mandate does not apply to police departments.

Most of those who remain unvaccinated have said they don't intend to get vaccinated. Two of the volunteers who are vaccinated have told the chief they'd walk out in

solidarity with the others.

“I personally have gotten the vaccine,” the chief said. “I made that choice because I felt it was important as the leader of this department to lead by example.”

So why didn't those who aren't vaccinated follow his example?

“It really is a personal choice. We advocated for the volunteers and everyone to get vaccinated,” Alsbury said. “But it remains a personal

choice and we can't force them.”

The community – and the state for that matter -- has far more to lose than the volunteers.

“Volunteers have nothing to lose and only something to gain: more sleep, more time with their families, more time on the weekends,” Alsbury said. “We don't force them to go on calls. There are no set hours like volunteering for the library or food bank.



Alsbury



Balensifer



Brown

When a call comes in at 2 in the morning, they might already have worked a 40-plus-hour job and they'll spend another up to 10 hours a week, if not more, going to calls and going to drills as volunteers.”

With just six to eight volun-

teers left to answer every call in Warrenton, the ramifications are huge, Mayor Henry Balensifer believes.

After being briefed on the issue last week, he wrote a letter to the governor spelling out the potential scenarios.

“Needless to say, this isn't something I want to wait to see if it will happen or not, and it is a credible problem,” Balensifer said Wednesday. “It's the scariest I've dealt with in my elected life because this has very real consequences for our community.”

Both Alsbury and Balensifer understand why the governor has come down hard on those who refuse to get vaccinated. But in Warrenton, 13 of the 15 unvaccinated volunteers have said they will continue to refuse.

“I truly believe that she made a decision that was best for all people,” Alsbury said. “I don't think she thought of the trickle down, the outfall from this.”

In his letter, Balensifer wrote: “It is my sincere hope that you can see the dire circumstances my city faces. We rely on volunteers, who unlike employees with economic considerations, have nothing to lose from leaving the department. ...

“I recognize that there is a broader picture than simply the town of Warrenton that you must consider. However, I am sure you are aware that Warrenton is among the majority of Oregon cities who rely on volunteer firefighters to provide emergency medical services and fire protection. Threatening to fire employees over a mandate is a bit of a game of chicken.”

The worst part is that the mandate decimates the number of volunteers who are trained emergency medical responders, Balensifer said.

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