

Q&A: Fire chief shares protections, needs during virus

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

On Wednesday, March 25, Oregon’s congressional delegation — Reps. Suzanne Bonamici, Peter DeFazio, Earl Blumenauer, Greg Walden, and Kurt Schrader, and Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley — described “serious shortages” of personal protective equipment, including respiratory masks, surgical gowns and gloves in helping to combat the spread of the coronavirus. This equipment is necessary to protect the health of responders, health care workers and the public to prevent the further spread of the coronavirus.

The Signal talked to Seaside’s Fire Chief Joey Daniels. Daniels is Clatsop County’s Fire Defense Chief, a rotating position every three years amongst the chiefs in the county. He spoke about virus-related needs, protocols and protections for firefighters.

Q: What is the protocol now when the fire department responds to a medical emergency?

Daniels: When we get a call, our dispatchers will ask COVID-related questions.

Does the patient have fever, cough, difficulty breathing? If we hear that, as soon as we get on the scene, we’ll take two guys and suit them up in the parking lot before they even enter. They’ll put on a Tyvek suit, rubber gloves, goggles and we’ll send only those two in.

If Medix beats us there, we’ll wait and ask them what they need.

If we don’t know or it’s unknown, one firefighter goes in with a mask and goggles. “Hey, (we’re) fire department, what do you have?” If they’re coughing, (or have) a fever, he’ll back out and tell the crew we need two suited up to go back in.

We also do this for car wrecks and others scenes — whatever the nature of the call.

Q: What do you do after you use the protective equipment?

Daniels: We throw gowns away every time they’re worn, and throw gloves in the trash. We’ll throw goggles in a bag and



LEFT: Fire departments throughout the country, including Seaside, are facing a shortage of protective equipment. RIGHT: Adam Poszgai suits up.



Photos by R.J. Marx

when we get back here (to the firehouse) we’ll de-con (decontaminate) them.

Once we clean them, we’ll put them back in the box. We put a box in each truck.

Q: What does the box consist of?

Daniels: The kit includes a gown, face shield with goggles, gloves and some kind of splash shield.

Q: Where do these come from?

Daniels: A lot of this equipment is equipment we already had. We have a bunch on order, but like everybody, it’s back-ordered or they don’t have them in stock.

Q: Where do you order from?

Daniels: Any and every vendor you can think of.

Q: So you go online and Google “protective equipment”?

Daniels: Well, we do a lot of ordering through our normal vendors.

I asked a gal we order batteries from, “Any chance you have any Tyvek suits?”

She said, “Oh yes, we have some.”

We have 30 suits. We are trying to get more. We put in orders with the state, and I put in orders with the county.

Everybody with the county fire departments sends their requests to me. I send them to the (Clatsop County) Department of

Emergency Management, Tiffany Brown. She forwards those onto the state. The state fire marshal is in charge of distributing whatever they get. And so we probably get 1/20th of what we ordered.

Q: The state decides what you get?

Daniels: Yes.

Q: Can you order your-self directly?

Daniels: We can. We’re working on that too.

Q: How is your supply?

The county right now is doing pretty good with what we have, but I’d say it’s limited for a week or 10 days if we don’t get anything else.

So we’re all working with our vendors, because nobody knows how long we have to go or how many patients we’ll have.

We’re all trying to keep enough that everybody feels comfortable they have enough for their area.

Q: Are you getting specific direction from the state fire marshal?

Daniels: Yes. There is guidance from them, task forces that give guidance on PPE (personal protective equipment). Every day something comes out. We’re all watching the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). All public safety here is working together with our quarantine plan.

We’ve always worked closely with all the law

enforcement here. Most of the fire agencies have a good relationship with law enforcement. We’re all partners. Let’s watch out for each other.

Q: If you had one particular need, what would it be?

Daniels: N95 masks, dust and surgical masks. That would be a need of the county. We have nil to none.

Q: Builder’s masks? Construction, cotton?

Daniels: Dust masks are OK. They’ll limit some exposure, but if it’s a known exposure, we’d use an N95.

Q: What is an N95?

Daniels: An N95 has a pretty good seal and it has to be fit-tested. The other masks can have a seal or not have a seal, but it’s better than nothing.

Q: If people are sitting home knitting masks, will that solve the need?

Daniels: Anything is better than nothing. They’re saying it’s up to 14 days before we see signs, so it could expose us any time. It’s a public safety thing.

Q: How are you working with other counties?

Daniels: We have very limited resources in public safety in Clatsop County anyway. We’d rather err on the side of caution. We’re learning from other counties as well, Washington, Columbia, Lane, some of the places that have already had exposures. We’re asking

what they’re doing. We’re constantly interacting.

The state’s done a great job with conference calls. We have one every Wednesday, or sometimes twice a week, and with the county, we’re in the loop, it’s every day tweaking that with the resources we have, with the equipment we have, now that we have confirmed cases.

We still do our job to help citizens. We’re just being maybe more cautious with the equipment. So if you see us coming into your house and you say, “Well, you guys are all dressed up,” we’re dressed up because you may not know you have something. We just want to make sure we don’t get anything. If I were to lose five or six guys to quarantine, it would be devastating.

Q: Is your call load up, down or about the same?

Daniels: It’s always increasing. We haven’t gone down at all. Yesterday there were seven calls. The weekend, even with people not here, the call load was the same as the weekend before. Obviously the ambulance company was busier and busier. We’re backing them up. We’re constantly monitoring the hospital.

There’s a lot of communication between the county health department, fire service, police, law enforcement, hospitals. A lot of emails going back and forth. If Chief (Dave) Ham or Chief (Jason) Schermerhorn get something from the law enforcement side, they are sending me their side and vice versa, if I get fire stuff, it gets kicked out.

Q: Have people been compliant?

Daniels: Everybody acts differently during an emergency. People really at this point in time need to be a lot more positive, come up with solutions.

We’ll get through it, but sometimes the negativity with one another is not something that is helpful at all.

Being cooped up is a struggle for all of us. But bear with us when we’re there, we’re partaking of these extra precautions for the safety of all of us. Sometimes people think it’s not fast enough, but we’re working hard and diligently to try to keep up with staffing and equipment.

Masks: ‘This is just us adapting to COVID-19’

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that has any of the signs of COVID-19 we are putting a Tyvek suit on, goggles, and an N95,” Daniels said. “We have always worn N95s and safety glasses on any patient that has signs of the flu, so this is just us adapting to COVID-19.”

Dispatchers screen fire calls by asking if the patient has COVID-19-related symptoms like fever, cough or difficulty breathing, he said.

If the risk is clear, two firefighters don a Tyvek suit, rubber gloves and goggles before entering.

If risk is uncertain, one firefighter will enter with an N95, goggles and gloves to get information before making a decision on what others wear.

These procedures are in place for all fire calls, including fires, accidents or other emergencies.

Daniels listed the county’s main needs as more N95 masks, gowns, surgical masks, hand sanitizer and wipes.

“This is all equipment we would share with all of our public safety partners throughout the county,” he said. “We all work well together and help one another out. This is no different.”

Daniels said departments are “searching every day,” to bolster supply. “We have every agency in the county looking and helping one another out if they find a resource.”

Daniels said he wanted to set the public at ease if firefighters enter a scene fully covered in protective gear.

“We’re dressed up because you may not know you have something,” he said. “We want to make sure we don’t get anything. If I were to lose five or six guys to quarantine, it would be devastating.”

PUBLIC SAFETY LOGS



March 19

11:52 a.m., 2900 block Keepsake Drive: Fraud is reported.

March 21

12:30 a.m., 700 block S. Wahanna: Police assist county police on a call.

1:13 a.m., 400 block N. Prom: A disturbance is reported, also an assault.

4:31 p.m., Wahanna/Shore Terrace: Officers contact subjects in an RV after caller complains they are illegally camping; subjects say they have reservations at the RV park, and are waiting to check in.

5:18 p.m., N. Prom: Police respond to a report of a subject having emotional issues in the lobby of a hotel; they stand by until Medix arrives, and the person is transported to the hospital.

6:03 p.m., The Cove: Caller complains about “Go Home” signs posted in the Cove; officers remove signs.

9:18 p.m., Wahanna Road: A person is arrested and charged with DUII.

March 22

10:41 a.m., 300 block S. Roosevelt: Caller complains about a transient smoking and “acting strangely” in front of business doors. Police advise subject they are trespassing.

3:44 p.m., 12th and Necanicum: Responding to a complaint about an aggressive dog, officer petted and played with the dog, who was not aggressive. Call unfounded.

9:14 p.m., 700 block S. Wahanna: Police assist sheriff’s deputy with taking a subject into custody.

March 26

6:55 a.m., Seltzer Park restroom: A person is cited for disorderly conduct in the second degree.

8:04 a.m., Broadway park: A person sleeping in the park is advised of the ordinance of the park being closed.

8:16 a.m., Police headquarters: A person came in to register as a sex offender.

9:42 a.m., 2200 block N. Roosevelt: A caller reports the employees of Dutch Bros. coffee are not practicing social distancing inside their workplace. Officer advises the employees of the complaint who say they are doing their best to stay 6 feet apart. No violation was observed.

3:25 p.m., Cooper and Seabright: Driver of a truck and trailer reported in the area as possibly camping; officer speaks with the driver who says he has nowhere to go but will move along shortly.

5:33 p.m., Lea Way: Police check on a man reported lying in the grass. He said he is fine, but resting due to illness. No further action taken.

7:15 p.m., Edgewood and Avenue K: A woman reported trespassing tells police she is fixing the fence she was reported attempting to slip through. Police determine she is fixing the fence.

7:51 p.m., Cooper and Seabright: The man with the truck and trailer reported

camping is reported as not having left the area. Police warn him he will receive a citation if he does not pack up and leave in a timely manner.

22:28 p.m., Relief Pitcher: An assault is reported.



March 21

3:44 p.m., 400 block Highland Drive: Emergency medical response.

March 22

11:49 a.m., 33000 block Rosie Lane: Fire investigation.

1:35 p.m., 1200 block Avenue B: Emergency medical response.

March 24

2:41 a.m., 300 block Fifth Avenue: Emergency medical response.

8:18 a.m., 800 block Tenth Avenue: Emergency medical response.

9:43 a.m., 800 block Ocean Way: Emergency medical response.

10:44 a.m., 2400 block Beach Drive: Fire investigation.

March 25

9:13 a.m., 2300 block Ocean Vista Boulevard: Fire alarm.

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