

SEASIDE

State discloses outbreaks at care homes

By **ERICK BENGEL** and **GARY WARNER**
The Astorian and Oregon Capital Bureau

The Oregon Health Authority has disclosed coronavirus outbreaks at two care homes in Seaside.

Avamere at Seaside, on S. Roosevelt Drive, had 10 virus cases dating to Jan. 14, according to the health authority's weekly outbreak report. Suzanne Elise Assisted Living Community, on Forest Drive, had eight cases dating to Jan. 11.

Margo Lalich, Clatsop County's interim public health director, said that, as of last Friday, Suzanne Elise had 10 virus cases associated with the outbreak.

In early August, Suzanne Elise had three virus cases. The outbreak disclosed in last Thursday's report is the first time Avamere in Seaside has appeared on the state's list.

Both facilities are owned and operated by Avamere Health Services LLC, based in Wilsonville.

Paula Nickles, an administrative assistant at Avamere at Seaside, said no one was hospitalized as a result of the outbreak.

Administrators at Suzanne Elise could not immediately provide a comment.

No other information was immediately available.

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention singled out care homes as settings of special concern.

Residents often have age-related underlying health conditions that render them vulnerable to infection and severe illness from the virus. The

communal nature of long-term living facilities can make social distancing difficult and allow the virus to spread easily.

Last year, six virus-related deaths were tied to care homes in Clatsop County. Five were residents of Clatsop Care Memory Community in Warrenton, while the other was a resident of Neawanna By The Sea in Seaside.

The new outbreaks occurred as the omicron variant has caused a spike of virus cases across Oregon.

The omicron variant wave will peak over the next two weeks and begin a steep decline, according to a new state forecast.

Oregon Health & Science University late last week projected hospitalizations will likely peak on Feb. 1 at 1,553 COVID-19 patients.

"Oregon appears to be flattening the curve of hospitalized patients," the report said. "Infections are likely to peak in the next week and hospitalizations the week after."

The forecast came as the state continues to see key numbers climb.

The leader of Oregon's hospital association warned that a steady increase in COVID patients needing hospital care is pushing the state's hospitals to a "breaking point."

Becky Hultberg, the president and CEO of the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems, said during an online news conference that hospitals are treating dozens of new virus patients a day.

"The next few weeks will be really tough, and it's important for people to understand that," Hultberg said.



Sea Turtles Forever

Sea Turtles Forever wants to protect the marine population from the risks from microplastics.

Keeping sea turtles safe from microplastics

By **KATHERINE LACAZE**
For Seaside Signal

In the battle against microplastic pollution on the beaches in and around Cannon Beach, Sea Turtles Forever's Blue Wave team is on the frontlines, but they rely on steady volunteerism to make a dent in this mammoth problem.

Seaside resident Marc Ward, co-founder and executive director of the environmental nonprofit Sea Turtles Forever, gave a virtual presentation about "Microplastic Recovery on the North Oregon Coast" as part of January's Friends of Haystack Rock's World of Haystack Rock library lecture series.

"It starts with turtles, and we're still doing marine turtle works," Ward said.

Microplastics are not only affecting the turtles, they're affecting all sea life now, and humans as well. Sea Turtles Forever is actively working to be part of the solution.

"I realized we had to do something about this—whatever we can do," Ward said.

Origins

Sea Turtles Forever, now in its 20th year, started with conducting research to protect sea turtles in northwest Costa Rica. Ward was taking a break from Portland State University and studying a nesting site on Punta Pargos near the town of Paraiso, which translates to Paradise.

The site was unique, as it had numerous sea turtle species nesting there, from leatherbacks and Pacific greens to hawksbill sea turtles. Unfortunately, it was also subject to relentless poaching.

According to Ward, the "poaching of turtles is a culturally embedded practice in Costa Rica." Before commercial fishing, loss of habitat, and other issues — like microplastic pollution — it was a somewhat sustainable practice, he added. However, in light of external factors affecting the sea turtle populations, poaching was no longer sustainable.

Ward contacted Costa Rica's leading environmental attorney, who suggested he conduct a survey of the nests. With his wife Rachel, Ward set up a monitoring and protection program. They started by annually removing thousands upon thousands, or "literally tons," of marine plastic that had accumulated on the beach, Ward said.

That kicked off a 10-year marine plastic study that uncovered devastating realities.

Necropsies revealed that every sea turtle was filled with microplastics — which is generally any piece of debris that is 5 millimeters or less — and even some larger plastic debris.

Realizing they were facing a significant challenge, Sea Turtles Forever transitioned focus to researching microplastics. Ward predicted there would be serious conse-



Marc Ward (left), founder of Sea Turtles Forever, with a dump truck load of microplastic leaving the beach.



Microplastics collected in Cannon Beach.

quences when large groups of foraging turtles came into contact with high-density areas of microplastics, and that's what they found.

"I don't consider microplastics trash — it a whole different category of toxic waste," Ward said. The sharp edges cause internal abrasions, and the sea turtles will feel full without getting adequate nutrients. Additionally, microplastics have the ability to absorb toxins at about one million times the concentration found in the surrounding water.

"Just the worst chemicals on earth, they're all in the ocean now," Ward said, adding they pose a threat "not only to turtles, but our entire marine food web."

"Closer to home" Microplastics and the concentrated toxins they carry are not only a problem for marine life. Returning to Oregon, Ward took his family to the beach, and he noticed there was "quite a landfill of microplastics, which I hadn't

seen previously." "It was really a new dynamic for our Oregon beaches," he said, adding the chemicals that didn't previously have an environmental pathway back to humans were now heavily concentrated in microplastics and showing up on the beach en masse.

His son, then 2-year-old, tried to eat some, and Ward could see "we had to come up with some solution to secure the beach, so these kids would have a safe place to play."

Using his personal resources, Ward started developing a filter system to remove microplastics from the sand. After experimenting with different prototypes and fine-tuning his system, he finally came up with a tool that works efficiently to generate a passive static charge via friction on the filter screen and collect "micron-sized plastics."

"It looks like sand, because it's the size of sand," Ward said. "To the naked eye, you can't tell the difference."

Now, the system is used by hundreds of groups and individuals globally to filter out microplastics, which was Ward's goal. Locally, STF's Blue Wave program has been working diligently for the past decade or so to clean the beaches in Cannon Beach and the surrounding area, such as Ecola State Park, Oswald West State Park and Fort Stevens.

"What we really need to do is restore these beaches to their pristine state," Ward said.

As a volunteer-based program, however, COVID-19 has impacted their labor force. They went from having upwards of 300 volunteers to about 30. While they're "bouncing back," Ward said, they need dedicated volunteers to run the program consistently.

"People can come any day of the week and help us," he added.

He also encourages people to cut down on their plastic consumption how and when possible. For example, people can prioritize buying food products in cans and wax cardboard and glass containers, instead of plastic.

It's "pretty much impossible" for consumers to not to buy any plastic, he said, "but you can cut 50 percent relatively easily, just by shopping smart."

"Any time when you're shopping, when you can avoid buying plastic items, this planet will be better off," he added.

Ward's whole presentation is available on YouTube or FOHR's Facebook page.

The World of Haystack Rock library lecture series, which features an array of topics and speakers, runs the second Wednesday of every month, from November to May. According to the Friends of Haystack Rock, the lecture series will continue in an online format until it is safe to gather in person again. For more information contact Tiffany Boothe, FOHR board member, at seasideaquarium@gmail.com.

CORRECTION

Gearhart parks plan

In "City dune landscaping restrictions dropped from parks master plan," it was incorrectly stated that policy 19, "environmental integrity," was removed from the Gearhart parks master plan by the Planning Commission. The policy was not removed, but modified to add clarity. Portions regulating environmental integrity in city-owned parks were retained.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Contact local agencies for latest meeting information and attendance guidelines.

TUESDAY, FEB. 1

Seaside Community Center Commission, 10 a.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center, 1225 Avenue A.

Seaside Planning Commission, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 2

Gearhart City Council, 7 p.m., www.cityofgearhart.com.

THURSDAY, FEB. 3

Seaside Parks Advisory Committee, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

MONDAY, FEB. 7

Seaside Housing Task Force, 6 p.m. 989 Broadway.

THURSDAY, FEB. 10

Seaside Convention Center Commission, 5 p.m., 415 First Ave., Seaside.

Gearhart Planning Commission, 6 p.m., cityofgearhart.com.

MONDAY, FEB. 14

Seaside City Council, 7 p.m., 989 Broadway.

TUESDAY, FEB. 15

Seaside Planning Commission, work session, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

Seaside School District, 6 p.m., https://www.seaside.k12.or.us/.

TUESDAY, FEB. 22

Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board of Directors, 5:15 p.m., 1225 Ave. A.

MONDAY, FEB. 28

Seaside City Council, 7 p.m., 989 Broadway.

TUESDAY, MARCH 1

Seaside Community Center Commission, 10 a.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center, 1225 Avenue A.

Seaside Planning Commission, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2

Gearhart City Council, 7 p.m., www.cityofgearhart.com.

THURSDAY, MARCH 3

Seaside Parks Advisory Committee, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

THURSDAY, MARCH 10

Seaside Convention Center Commission, 5 p.m., 415 First Ave., Seaside.



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Seaside Signal

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