

Mahar disagrees with vaccination mandate

By Philip L. Watness
The Pioneer

The county's public health agency could be short-staffed if some employees decide to not get inoculated for COVID-19, as ordered by Washington State Gov. Jay Inslee.

Skamania County Commissioner Richard Mahar said he supports individuals who choose not to be vaccinated, but will encourage adherence to the order to protect the county against reprisals from state agencies such as the Department of Labor and Industries.

"I don't want to jeopardize the county," Mahar said. "But it's extremely difficult for me. I'm of the opinion that if you're sick, stay home

and get tested if you think you may have the virus, and stay out for 14 days. But this notion that everyone is a potential death threat is what I call fear porn. That's just not healthy for people. The collateral damage seems way worse than whatever they think they're preserving."

Community Health Deputy Director Tamara Cissell told the commissioners on Tuesday, Aug. 31, that "COVID is consuming us on the public health side." She said the impending requirement for all health care workers to get vaccinated might also lead to the loss of employees in the agency.

Mahar on Friday, Aug. 20, Continued on p. 2



Skamania County residents participate in a memorial on Friday, Sept. 14, 2001, following the 911 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the crash of United Airlines Flight 93. Pioneer archive photo

Increasing COVID-19 cases stress health care system

By Philip L. Watness
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Washington State Health Director Dr. Umair Shah urged parents or guardians to mask their children – not only in school settings but anywhere else they might be at risk of contracting COVID-19. He also said anyone 12 and older should consider being vaccinated.

Dr. Shah made the comments during a press briefing on Thursday, Sept. 2. The session also included the perspective of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Deputy Superintendent Michaela W. Miller.

"We strongly, strongly recommend that any child, age 12 and older, get vaccinated as soon as possible to help protect themselves and their classmates," Dr. Shah said.

As of Aug. 30, 41 percent of children ages 12-15 and 48 percent, ages 16-17 were fully vaccinated. Dr. Shah said those numbers need to greatly improve to help limit the spread of COVID-19.

The layered approach adopted by school districts includes vaccinations, but also mask-wearing by children and

school staff, frequent hand-washing, good ventilation of school rooms, social distancing, and prompt testing for COVID-19.

"Vaccines are at the top of this (list of strategies), but next comes masks," he said. "We know they're very good at limiting transmission."

He said studies in school districts across the nation confirm that "when masks are worn by students and staff, even in areas of high community transmission, the schools remain protected."

He said anyone planning to enter a school should refrain from doing so if they feel at all sick. They should also get tested if they have symptoms that could be caused by the novel coronavirus (fever and/or chills, coughing, shortness of breath, muscle aches or pains, fatigue, new loss of taste or smell, headache, sore throat, nausea, diarrhea and nasal congestion or runny nose).

"Schools have a great resource for testing on campus," Dr. Shah said. The state's Learn to Return initiative was created to help school districts, both public and private, with their efforts to limit the

spread of COVID-19 (Information at: <https://learntoreturn.org/>).

DOH and OSPI planned to provide updated school guidance following Labor Day, including detailed best practices for implementing the required health safety measures.

"We know that in-person learning is tremendously beneficial to children's overall well-being and their development," he said. He acknowledged that children have experienced social and emotional isolation over the past year.

"That has been significant," he said. "I see that in my kids every single day."

OSPI Deputy Superintendent Miller said she shared the concerns of other parents about sending their children back to school because she has two school-aged kids. But she said she believes that the layered measures implemented by school districts will help protect them from exposure to COVID-19. However, the behavior of community members also factors strongly into the spread of the potentially fatal disease. She encouraged people to adopt the same strategies as schools – vaccinations, masking, social distanc-

ing and testing.

"Families can help with those safety measures by modeling those practices outside of the school setting," Miller said. "That is probably the most important thing."

Dr. Shah said hospitalizations of people afflicted with COVID-19 have ramped up so dramatically in recent weeks other medical procedures will be impacted, especially for emergency rooms.

"We're seeing hospitalization rates at numbers we've never seen before, and it's taxing the health care system," said Dr. Scott Lindquist, DOH acting chief science officer.

Going into the Labor Day weekend, Dr. Umair Shah urged people to not further burden hospitals by getting into vehicle collisions or other situations that would require emergency care. That includes reducing potential exposure in large crowds, even outdoors.

Infections throughout the state have ramped up considerably since late July, eclipsing the prior, or fourth wave, in April, and reaching the same level of transmission as over last winter.

"This fifth wave ... has largely been driven by those

who are unvaccinated," he said. "It's also being driven by the Delta variant."

"This pandemic rages on and it rages on where tools that we have at our disposal are not being utilized," he said.

"Those who are unvaccinated are markedly more – 10 to 20 times – more likely to be unprotected and hospitalized," he said. "We want to do everything we can to get as all those eligible for vaccines in the state of Washington to be vaccinated."

Dr. Lindquist said indications are that the steep rise in COVID-19 transmissions may be slowing down.

"We're hoping this is going to signal a plateau," he said. "The concern, though, is that this plateau in cases usually precedes the hospitalization plateau by one to two weeks."

He said the number of deaths "have remained fairly low" but he warned that death from COVID-19 also lags behind transmission rates.

A news release issued Sept. 3, by the Klickitat County Public Health noted two deaths from COVID-19 last week and 134 active cases. Continued on p. 2

News Briefs

County seeks volunteers

Skamania County seeks applicants to fill two positions on the Skamania County Planning Commission. The commission meets twice a month to make recommendations on land use policies and regulations for the unincorporated areas of the county.

Applicants must reside in District No. 2 or District No. 3. They will serve a four-year term through Aug. 31, 2025. The positions will be open until filled.

For more information, contact Alan Peters at apeters@co.skamania.wa.us.

Logtoberfest set for early October

Logtoberfest celebrates Skamania County's rich logging history as well as the legendary Sasquatch. The Wind River Business Association and several local businesses host the event on Saturday, Oct. 2, at Gorge-ous Weddings at Wind Mountain Ranch in Home Valley.

The free event runs noon to 6 p.m.

People of all ages can observe chainsaw art demonstrations as well as blacksmithing and vintage logging equipment demonstrations. Vendors of Sasquatch items, arts and crafts and food will participate. Kids can enjoy games, crafts, face-painting, and other fun activities.

The Sonny Hess Band and The Big River Blues Band will take the stage to kick off the event on a high note.

Beverages from local craft breweries Backwoods Brewing, Walking Man, Thunder Island, Free Bridge and Pfriend, whiskey from Skunk Brother Spirits and wine and cider from the Columbia River Gorge producers will be poured in the beer garden.

Entrance to the beer garden is \$15 and includes one beverage ticket plus a commemorative Mason jar glass. Additional tickets can be purchased at \$7 each.

People who come dressed in a dirty hickory shirt and cork boots can enter the "dress like a logger contest" or enter the newt contest "Sasquatch hair leg contest" for a chance to win cool prizes.

For more information, call the Skamania County Chamber of Commerce at 800-989-9178.

The event is co-hosted by the Skamania County Chamber of Commerce and the Wind River Business Association.

Warmer temperatures expected to sustain wildfire risk

By Philip L. Watness
The Pioneer

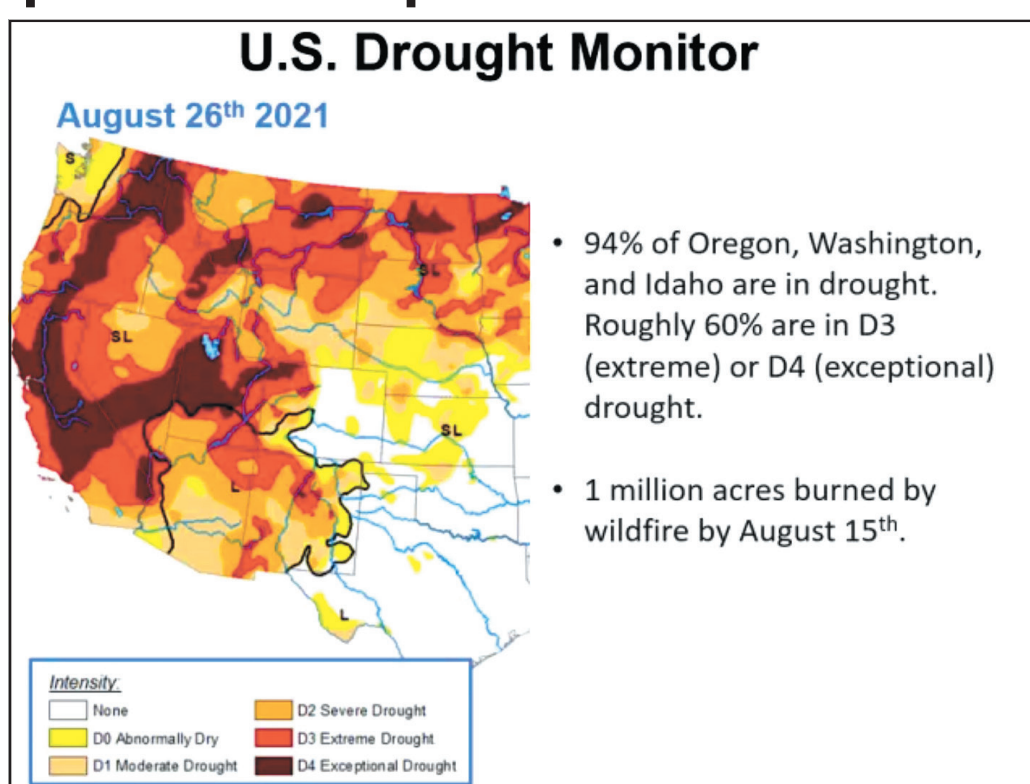
September's temperatures are expected to be higher than normal and precipitation to be lower than normal.

That doesn't bode well for state and federal agencies that have already seen a dramatic number of fires in the Pacific Northwest over the summer.

Anyone who lives or visits the Columbia River Gorge can see the evidence of a late season forest fire in the gray spars spotting the Oregon cliffs. They were scorched during the Eagle Creek fire that roared into being around 4:15 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 2, 2017.

That blaze wasn't declared fully contained until Nov. 30, and it continued to smolder in places as late as May 29, 2018.

Like most wildfires, human activity sparked the blaze which eventually cost an estimated \$37 million to contain. A 15-year-old Vancouver boy started the fire when he threw a smoke bomb while hiking above the Eagle Creek



Canyon. The fire eventually scorched across about 48,000 acres of forest which had not experienced any rain in 83 days.

Forests in Oregon and Washington states are at much higher risk of wildfires breaking out this summer as a per-

vasive drought blankets most of the western United States. The National Weather Service notes that this summer (June to August) is the hottest in recorded history for the region. The hot, dry spell in late June is testament to that fact.

The fire weather outlook

for the Pacific Northwest region has become so dire that the U.S. Forest Service hosted a wildfire briefing on Wednesday, Aug. 25. Suzanne Flory, regional fire communications specialist with the forest service noted that 39 large fires in Oregon and 43 in Wash-

ington had broken out over the summer. As of Sept. 2, 17 large, uncontained fires continue to burn in Oregon (five) and Washington (12).

"Low winter snowpack, early snow melt, and above normal temperatures all combined to produce challenging circumstances and conditions in the forests" as fire season began, said Ian Rickert, regional fire behavior analyst for both the forest service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Extreme and exceptional drought conditions in early June created areas "that were really set up for large fire occurrence coming into fire season," he said. "The situation has simply gone downhill since then."

Drought conditions worsened throughout Oregon and Washington in the past several months. He said the hot, dry weather has stressed the trees and makes dead fuels more readily available. Combustion can happen much more easily under the current conditions. Continued on p. 2

Cedar Creek Alpacas celebrates 12 years, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 11

SHS football, Sept. 3 Morton/White Salmon 30, Stevenson 14

Inside:

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This day in history

On Sept. 8, 1930, 3M begins marketing Scotch transparent tape.

In 1966, "Star Trek" premieres with its first-aired episode, "The Man Trap"

In 1971, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is inaugurated.

In 1974, President Gerald Ford pardons Richard Nixon.

In 1988, Yellowstone National Park is closed for the first time due to ongoing fires.

Museum car show results

By CGICM For The Pioneer

The 24th annual Show 'N Shine at the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center Museum (CGICM) drew 115 entries and hundreds of spectators on Saturday, Sept. 4, at the museum parking area.

The show was cancelled due to COVID-19 last year.

Winning entries are:

MOPAR – Annette Wells of Stevenson: 1969 Road Runner

GM – Janelle and Richard Cummins of Camas: GMC 1948 pickup

FoMoCo – Hans Strauss of Stevenson: 1955 Ford pickup

Under Construction – Byron Armour of Carson: 1964 Chevy pickup

Old Skool Rod – Jim Kane of Ridgefield: 1929 Ford Roadster

Sports Car – Damon and Roberta Hulit of The Dalles: 1924 Ford Tall Truck

Best 1920s – Damon and Roberta Hulit of The Dalles: 1924 Ford Tall Truck

Best 30s – Ralph Hatfield of Stevenson: 1931 Ford 5 Window Coupe

Best 40s – Hoby Hansen of Stevenson: 1946 Chevy Coupe

Best 50s – Jim Martell of Washougal: 1957 Ford Cus-

tom
Best 60s – Annette Wells of Stevenson: 1969 Plymouth Road Runner

Best 70s – Paula King of Grass Valley: 1973 Plymouth Road Runner

Best 80s – Barry Hamilton of Gresham: 1989 Chevy Silverado

Best Orphaned Car – Sam Bilyeu of The Dalles: 1936 Pontiac Town Sedan

Best Car Club Participant – Mid Columbia Car Club

Judge's Choice Best In Show – Randy Wells of Stevenson: 1938 Plymouth Rumble Seat Coupe



Hundreds of people enjoyed the collection of antique and classic automobiles at the annual car show on Saturday, Sept. 4, at the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center Museum. The show drew 115 entries. Photo by Philip L. Watness

Warmer temperatures...continued from p.1

“That all lends itself to persistent large fire growth in those areas where we have ignitions,” Rickert said. “The vast majority of large fires that we have on the landscape are within those areas that are delineated by extreme and exceptional drought.”

Large fires have also broken out in areas where drought conditions area as severe.

“When extreme weather events – high temperatures, high winds, instability – occurs in those areas, it’s still

very possible to have large fires and that’s exactly what we’ve experienced so far this year,” he said.

The region has had 2,923 wildfires which have burned 909,358 acres so far this year (through Aug. 24), according to the National Fire Interagency Center. In 2020, 3,853 fires burned 1.9 million acres of forest land, but that’s for the entire wildfire season.

“We still have some considerable time left on the calendar to accumulate more fires and

acres burned,” he said. “When you look at our statistics this year, we’re already north of 900,000 acres burned. We’ve already eclipsed the 10-year average (890,063 acres). If things continue on the current trajectory, it’s also likely that we will exceed the 10-year average in terms of number of wildfires (3,358).”

Many spots across Washington and Oregon had no “wetting rain” (a tenth of an inch of precipitation or more) for 70 or more days.

“That’s a long duration of time ... to go without measurable, substantial precipitation,” he said.

One metric regarding the potential for large fires called the Energy Release Component (ERC) mirrors the drought designations throughout the two states. The measurements for all of the Oregon Cascades shows a higher threat for wildfire. The ERC for the Gifford Pinchot National Forest is below normal, meaning less likelihood

for large fires, but the metrics for the forest around Mount Adams show a greater threat of fire.

While the situation in the Oregon Cascades is worse, large fires have also broken out in the central Washington Cascades. The Schneider Springs fire east of Mount Rainier has scorched 85,639 acres through Friday, Sept. 3. Lightning strikes on Aug. 3 caused the wildfire which isn’t expected to be fully contained until Oct. 1. Rickert said dry

east winds usually ramp up at this time of year, and primarily affect the western slopes of the Cascades and the coast range. Extremely low humidity accompanies those winds which typically only last for several days.

“That all promotes an amplifying effect on fire behavior and it does make most fires, either emerging or existing, resistant to control,” he said. “The likelihood of this occurring does increase as we move into the fall months.”

Increasing COVID-19...continued from p.1

“All of the Klickitat County residents that have either died or been hospitalized were unvaccinated,” the news release states. “As the number of COVID-19 cases increase across the Pacific Northwest, the demand for acute care and intensive care hospital beds also increases as COVID-19 patients fill the larger as well as the rural health care cen-

ters.”

“I recently had a patient who was quite ill and needed urgent surgery. She had to stay in the ER for most of the day before we could find a surgical hospital bed for her due to the hospitals all being full in the Pacific Northwest. The delay in transportation to a hospital that could perform the surgery may have resulted

in a worse outcome,” said Dr. Jeffrey Tanita with Klickitat Valley Health, in the news bulletin.

Skamania County Community Health Deputy Director Tamara Cissell updated the county commission on the number of positive COVID-19 results, which keep ramping up each day. The number could be higher, how-

ever, now that people can purchase home tests.

“We are seeing some indication that people are using the home-testing option, and not really reporting it,” she said. However, the Washington State Department of Health does not have a clear process for people to report the results, she said.

She said the county health

department continues to work toward having rapid testing available for symptomatic people.

She said using that method would mean a quicker turnaround for staff to contact people with the test results.

“For symptomatic people, that will speed things up, and hopefully lessen the need to have people who need to do

work on the weekends, as well,” she said.

As of Tuesday, Sept. 7, 562 cases of COVID-19 were listed on the health agency’s webpage. That includes 514 confirmed cases and 48 probable cases.

The site listed 27 active cases and 18 hospitalizations since the beginning of the outbreak.

Mahar disagrees...continued from p.1

sent an email to health department staff to express his concerns with the governor’s proclamation that all health care workers must be fully vaccinated by Oct. 18, or face dismissal.

He wrote that his email was his opinion alone, and not that of the board of county commissioners.

Mahar talked about his concerns in an interview with The Pioneer on Wednesday, Sept. 1.

“I feel this is extremely unfair for Gov. Inslee to put this on Tamara (Cissell) and to put it on her employees,” he said. “They have to make extremely difficult decisions that are unnecessary, in my opinion.”

Mahar said threatening the livelihoods of health agency workers who have been on the frontlines of battling COVID-19 for the past year and

a half is unproductive, especially because the county and state need more health care workers, not less.

“... I’m saying, don’t be threatening their jobs when you have a health care shortage already, and you’re going to start firing nurses because they have concerns about the vaccines?” he said.

Mahar worried that the county health department may lose employees who decide not get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Cissell “has been put into a situation she shouldn’t have to be in,” he said.

He pointed out that the messenger RNA vaccines (Moderna and Pfizer) have never been used before and that there may be long-term impacts from them.

“It has no track record yet,”

he said. “I’m not denying that the virus is real and people get really sick, and people die. I just question whether the vaccine is the – with a capital ‘the’ – answer, especially when you factor in that natural immunity is completely disregarded.”

Mahar said he has done online research about the effectiveness of natural immunity and has found quite a bit of evidence that it can provide protection against COVID-19. For instance, India reached a peak of COVID-19 cases in mid-May, fueled by the Delta variant, but that infections had dropped substantially despite the fact that only 11 percent of its population is fully vaccinated.

“The jury is out on all this stuff, so get your authoritative, emergency power stuff out of this,” Mahar said. “It’s fine that you recommend it.”

County employees who do not work for the county health agency are not required to be vaccinated under a policy adopted last month.

He said he believes that Gov. Inslee has since the beginning of the pandemic exercised executive powers that are draconian in nature.

He said the governor should’ve consulted with members of the state legislature before enacting emergency rules.

“This governor is drunk on emergency powers and I far prefer all this stuff going through the legislature,” he said. “Who has ever heard of emergency powers lasting a year and a half? So, you have a governor who on temporary emergency powers mandating that people put something into their bodies that might have a permanent impact.”



Jared Eck, left, Joe Kovacs and Larry Bosckis with RSV Building Solutions of Vancouver install new siding at the Riverview Community Bank in Stevenson on Friday, Aug. 27. The bank is being renovated inside and out. Photo by Philip L. Watness

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Fundraiser of the month
Library friends Book Sale

The Friends of Stevenson/North Bonneville Community Libraries sold dozens of books, T shirts and rice pouches during their book sale Sept. 2-4 at the Stevenson Methodist Church. Proceeds support various programs hosted by the organization, including musical performances, kids’ storytime, teen programs and other activities. The book sale was cancelled in 2020 due to COVID-19. Holding the sale at the Methodist church provided more space for people to socially distance as well as for more books to be displayed. The result was a successful fundraiser for the Friends of Stevenson/North Bonneville Community Libraries. Book Sale organizer Ellen Penswick of Home Valley said the sale supports library patrons, young and old.

For information about the library, call (360) 906-4828.

Sponsored by Riverview Community Bank