



SHERIFF

Tillamook County Sheriff's Office

5995 Long Prairie Rd. Tillamook, OR 97141

News Release
For Immediate Release

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

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Sheriff's Office Response to COVID-19

The current crisis surrounding the COVID-19 virus has presented significant issues for our county and our office is working diligently with other community partners, local government officials and state agencies on how to approach this matter. There are many rumors surrounding the COVID-19 virus and what exactly is the response from the Sheriff's Office and Tillamook County as a whole. I hope to address some of those issues in this letter.

The Tillamook County Incident Command Team was activated a few weeks ago when the COVID-19 threat became increasingly apparent and there have been many meetings in an effort to coordinate a county response from both law enforcement, public health officials and state, county and city government. Additionally, there have been several teleconference meetings with the Oregon State Sheriff's Association which I have participated in to discuss best practice and to formulate a consistent and strategic response to the virus threat. Many counties have responded in similar fashion with some level of variation. I wanted to outline the Sheriff's Office response.

The Tillamook County Board of County Commissioners has imposed an entry restriction at the Courthouse in accordance with an emergency declaration due to the COVID-19 threat. This restriction requires members of the public to make an appointment with the specific department they have business with. Members of the public are restricted from entering the courthouse without an appointment. The only exception to this restriction is if members of the public have business with Circuit Court, if that is the case the public will be allowed to enter the building and conduct business in the courtroom or at the Circuit Court window. Sheriff's Office Deputies have been stationed at the south entrance of the courthouse to assist with the enforcement of the entry restriction.

Earlier this week I ordered the administrative office and the Community Corrections Division office at the Justice Facility to close to the public. Appointments will also be required to conduct business with these two sections of the office. As of today, March 18, 2020, I have further ordered the Justice Facility

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to be closed to the public upon conferring with the Oregon State Police who have indicated they will also be closing the Tillamook office also located in the Justice Facility. Prior to today the lobby of the Justice Facility had remained open so the public could still access the Oregon State Police administrative office during business hours. With the decision by OSP to close their window to the public I have further ordered the lobby of the Justice Facility to be closed to the public entirely.

By closing the Justice Facility to the public does not mean that the Sheriff's Office has stopped conducting general business, community patrols or the management of the correctional facility. Our office continues to conduct law enforcement patrols across the county and the jail, Community Corrections Division and the administrative office are still fully staffed and operational. We are merely restricting public access to the building during this emergency situation. Our staff will continue to respond to emergencies, calls for service and will assist our partner law enforcement agencies in any way possible.

In an effort to continue to protect our staff and the inmates within our custody we have modified some of the internal operations in the jail. We have been working with the local Circuit Court Judges, District Attorney and the Oregon State Board of Parole on managing the jail population. Those aforementioned officials and agencies, in cooperation with our office, have identified a number of inmates who fit the criteria for early or modified release. This again is an attempt limit interaction and increase social distancing which has been outlined in an executive order from the Governor's Office.

Along with Circuit Court, we have released a number of inmates from custody who are at the end of their sentence or are considered to be a very low public safety risk. No inmates who have been determined to be a high flight risk or public safety risk to the community have been released. Most of these releases are inmates sentenced to incarceration for probation violations or lower level misdemeanors. No inmates who are pending charges for upper level felonies or present a significant public safety risk will be released.

An internal reorganization of the inmate housing plan has been imposed in an effort to establish an area where inmates could be quarantined if there were an exposure to or an outbreak of COVID-19. As some may or may not know, mere exposures to COVID-19 require an extended quarantine period and would cause significant logistical and safety and security concerns if it were to occur in our facility. We have also established a stringent screening process for individuals taken into custody.

Our patrol staff has been issued personal protective equipment such as facemasks, gloves and hand sanitizer solution. Patrol staff has been directed to conduct business and low prior calls by telephone if at all possible. There are some circumstances when this is not possible and our Deputies will be required

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to make personal contact with the public. The Sheriff's Office will continue to respond to all emergencies in person and will assist all law enforcement agencies as needed. It is our responsibility to be there to address the needs of the public and ensure the safety of our citizens and visitors.

I have instructed my command staff to re-evaluate our patrol schedule and redirect resources as needed if the COVID-19 threat increases. We are very mindful of the health and welfare of our staff and if employees are exhibiting symptoms they are requested to remain home. Myself, my command staff and our supervisor personnel will be assisting in all areas of the Sheriff's Office operation to ensure that we continue to perform our basic function, that is to protect the citizens of our county.

It is unclear how long this crisis will last and it is likely we may see further restrictions and modifications to our daily lives. What we do know is that this threat is real and we are doing everything in our power to protect the public, our law enforcement staff and the inmates within our custody.

Many of the modifications I have mentioned in this statement are similar to ones already implemented in many counties across the State of Oregon. My Sheriff's colleagues and I are all committed to public safety and we are in a situation where we must make tough decisions for the greater public good.

I encourage anyone who has question about our business modifications, restrictions or other changes to please contact my office and I would be happy to discuss them. We must all work together as a community to combat this threat that is upon us.

Please stay safe, protect your family and please exercise patience and caution as we move through this unprecedented public health crisis.

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