

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Jim Burke, with local news for February 8, 2022.

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Today is a special Election Day in Jefferson County. There are four School levies on the ballot in the County: One in Quilcene, one in Brinnon, and two in Port Townsend. The Brinnon and Port Townsend levies are replacements of existing school levies. The levy in Quilcene is a bond levy for school and athletic facilities construction. There are drop boxes at the County Courthouse, the Brinnon Community Center, Quilcene Community Center, and at the Jefferson County Library in Irondale. All drop boxes are closed and locked at 8pm tonight. Of course, you can also drop it in any mailbox, as long as your ballot is postmarked with today's date.

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A follow up on the fire at the paper mill in Port Townsend on January 22: East Jefferson Fire & Rescue engines arrived at the Port Townsend Paper Mill at 2:30pm, ten minutes after the call came in, and on arrival the firefighters were directed to a 200-yard-long wood-chip conveyor belt that was "fully involved" in flames. Firefighters "noticed the conveyor belt structure's fire sprinkler system was damaged," according to the incident report. Chief Bret Black, of East Jefferson Fire Rescue was interviewed Friday by the *Peninsula Daily News* and said that at the site of the fire, the sprinkler system was compromised. "There was a part missing," he said, and so the system section for the conveyor belt "was not operational."

The fire did not spread onto the sixth floor, as had previously been reported. Other sections of the mill's sprinkler system were working, which helped stop the flames from engulfing more of the building, Black said. East Jefferson Fire Rescue's investigation of the fire did not determine a cause, he noted. The damage, including the partially collapsed conveyor belt, prevented the crew from finding an obvious ignition source. The report estimates the damage at more than \$500,000.

**The following paragraph was not aired:**

(Nick Nachbar, general manager of the mill, wrote in an email to *Peninsula Daily News* that "We are currently producing container board using solely recycled fiber until the pulp mill returns to service," and said last week it would take three weeks to return to full operation.)

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Dr. Alison Berry was joined by a toddler on yesterday's meeting of the board of County Commissioners, and she reported that COVID-19 cases are dropping rapidly across the country. Hospitalizations are starting to decrease as well, down about 27% which are "a lagging indicator; and unfortunately, deaths, which are the latest lagging indicator have not decreased as of yet, so we are...still seeing about 2500 Americans dying every day due to COVID-19. It's still a very serious situation, but case counts are dropping and subsequently after that we can see hospitalizations and deaths follow, so we're moving in the right direction nationwide."

Cases in Washington are down 37%. King and Snohomish Counties are seeing the first, most rapid drop-offs as those areas were affected first by the current surge. On the Olympic Peninsula we are seeing a plateau of cases; on the east side of the mountains cases are still rising. In Jefferson County we are at 2,753 cases, and our case rate is slightly down to 1,069 per 100 thousand. Berry said, "this weekend we only added 42 cases, which is about half of what we've been adding in recent weekends so we are hoping that is the beginning of the decrease in cases that we anticipate." She added that we have three hospitalized, and we have lost 23 to COVID-19. In Clallam County, the case rate is 1,601 per hundred thousand, a slight decrease, and we have lost 95 people to COVID-19.

**The following paragraph was not aired:**

(She said that at this point we are seeing something that many had claimed all along, that “COVID-19 is no worse than the flu.” This is only true now among our fully vaccinated patients, she says, and the vaccine is keeping many people who contract COVID-19 alive and out of the hospital. Flu, she insisted, is still a very serious disease that can lead to Hospitalization or death, especially in older populations.)

March 11 is the target date to lift the vaccine requirements in restaurants in Clallam County based on a target number of 200 cases per 100 thousand or slightly above that if the hospital system is functioning well. She stressed that Individual restaurants can continue the requirement if they so choose to keep their staff and customers safe. She also went on to say that mask requirements will probably continue after mid March, because although cases might be far lower, COVID-19 will still be here.

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On Friday, Feb. 4, Washington State Parks announced the birth of a new northern elephant seal on January 31, at Bowman Bay in Deception Pass State Park. Staff at Deception Pass have closed the Bowman Bay boat launch to all visitors and have closed the day-use area at Bowman Bay to pets. These measures will give the pup room to nurse, lower its chances of imprinting on humans and preserve its habitat until it is weaned. Elephant seal pups nurse for 24 to 28 days. They weigh 30 to 80 pounds at birth and quadruple their weight in a month. The mother leaves once the pup is weaned, and the pup may take another two weeks to swim or dive. Northern elephant seals spend most of their time at sea feeding on squid, dogfish, or sharks. They make two migrations each year and come ashore to birth, breed or molt.

**The following paragraph was not aired:**

Parks Stewardship Program Manager Lisa Lantz emphasizes that a pup found alone on the beach is not necessarily in distress. “The mother may be coming back, or the pup may have become independent,” said Lantz. “The key is not to ascribe human qualities to a wild animal.” (If a seal pup looks sick, she advises visitors to tell park staff or call the West Coast Marine Stranding Network at 1-866-767-6114.) Lantz reminds visitors that it is illegal to disturb marine mammals, which means staying at least 50 yards away. Northern elephant seals are a federally protected species.

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KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and five PM Monday through Thursday and at noon on Friday and Saturday. You can contact us through [news@kptz.org](mailto:news@kptz.org). This is Jim Burke. Thank you for listening.