

May 4, 2023

Co-chair Frederick, Co-chair McLain and members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for hearing from me today. My name is Mike Walsh and I'm here to share my personal experience calling the Oregon Poison Center, and respectfully request your support of funding for the Center.

Several years ago, I was working at Portland State University at the time at the front desk for the Housing department, when Oregon first implemented COVID public safety measures, urging everyone to stay home, and all the staff except for me, my associate director, and our live-in staff were sent home. We still had student residents living with us so we needed to staff the desk. As you'll remember in those initial weeks of the COVID pandemic, information and changes were coming out quickly, people were scared and everyone was trying to adapt and take in all the information.

It was a hot day and I was thirsty. I reached for a bottle of water in a regular water bottle and just started drinking it. I was moving quickly, one thing to the next and, to be honest, wasn't paying close attention when I grabbed the water. As I was drinking it and it was tilted up, I noticed the water was blue! So, I dropped the bottle and spit out what was in my mouth but I was pretty scared. I didn't know what it was but could tell immediately it wasn't something I should be drinking.

I momentarily considered whether I needed to leave work and head up the hill from PSU to get immediate care at OHSU, but remembered the Oregon Poison Center and quickly looked up the number. I called and someone answered the phone right away. The staff on the other end of the line immediately began working to calm me down with some skillful listening and soothing tones while also gathering information from me with good questions about the situation and what I drank. Based on our conversation, they quickly came to the theory that it was plant fertilizer and asked me to look for a box or a canister of that and, sure enough, I found it. They asked me to read of the label and I did and then they asked me about how much I drank. They reassured me that the amount and kind of solution I drank was not dangerous, but that I should be sure to drink a lot of water and be sure to pour out that bottle. They also urged me to tell the staff not to use regular water bottles for fertilizer!

I went from being sure I was going to die from poisoning to feeling reassured and confident that I didn't need to access medical care. The Oregon Poison Center was there for me when I needed it urgently. The staff I spoke with was amazing, and truly expert, at handling my case. From this experience, I know the importance of immediate access to the services the Poison Center provides, and know there are many, many other Oregonians out there with similar experiences.

Please support the Oregon Poison Center's request for increased state funding to fill the gap left in their budget by federal funding reductions. Your support will allow the Center and its amazing team to continue serving the people of Oregon without any reductions to their services.

Thanks again for the opportunity to share my story.