



March 16, 2020

Puyallup Tribe temporarily closes Emerald Queen Casino locations for 2 weeks, restricts non-essential government operations

'We are in this together,' Tribal Council says; employees will be paid and given full benefits during closure; I-5 operations will move into new I-5 casino upon reopening

In a move to help slow the spread of COVID-19, the Puyallup Tribe is shutting down both of its Emerald Queen Casino locations as curtailing non-essential government operations for two weeks beginning at midnight on Monday, March 16. Tribal government and casino staff will reassess conditions toward the end of the two-week period and determine how to proceed.

The Puyallup Tribal Council, the Tribe's governing body, said employees will not experience a disruption in wages or benefits during the two-week period. The Tribe is Pierce County's seventh-largest employer, with more than 3,000 employees.

Tribal Council also is preparing a declaration of a public health emergency.

The moves follow daily discussions with Council, staff and public health experts. The closures are meant to support social distancing, which public health authorities have said is an important means of slowing the spread of the virus.

"The health and safety of our community and its Tribal members, employees, customers and neighbors, is our first priority," the seven-member Tribal Council stated. "Daily, we have regularly consulted with public health experts and followed their guidance, and their guidance is clear – with the explosion of COVID-19 in recent days, we need to move fast and increase social distancing to slow the spread of this virus."

Government operations to scale back

"The Tribe is committed to providing services to our membership," Tribal Council said.

During the paring back of government operations, essential services will continue. Those employees engaged in activities not deemed essential may be temporarily reassigned to other functions. Tribal

members with questions may check the Tribe's website – PuyallupTribe-nsn.gov – or call the main switchboard – (253) 573-7800 – for updates and more information.

Tribe offers EQC Riverboat and adjacent land to public health authorities

In another move, Tribal Council voted to offer the Emerald Queen Riverboat and its adjacent 45 acres on Alexander Avenue to public health authorities as a possible isolation site or command center if needed. The Riverboat location has been used in recent years as the site of Firecracker Alley and Tribal membership meetings.

Tribal leaders contacted County Executive Bruce Dammeier and Governor Inslee on Friday to discuss needs.

“We have been in close communication with Governor Inslee and Executive Dammeier since the beginning,” Tribal Council said. “We stand with our neighbors during this public health crisis and will do whatever we can to help.”

Other Tribal entities, licensed businesses also affected

Also in accordance with recent public health guidelines, Tribal Council has been giving instructions to all of its other entities to modify operations as needed. It also is contacting business owners licensed through the Tribe to ensure they follow public health guidelines.

Another consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak is a delay in the opening of the Tribe's new \$450 million, 310,000-square-foot I-5 casino. When the casinos reopen, operations at the existing I-5 location will shift to the new I-5 location at 2920 E. R. St. in Tacoma.

In the past two weeks, Tribal government, the casinos and other Tribal Entities undertook precautions as recommended by Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, the Washington Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control, beginning with urging employees to wash hands, with wiping down surfaces and with sending home sick employees. Emerald Queen Casino implemented deep cleanings and encouraged social distancing as well.

“All of us in the world have noted this is a fluid situation,” Tribal Council said. “Conditions have sometimes changed by the hour. We have watched the sometimes drastic measures other countries have taken in recent weeks and we see their success. We know we need to be proactive – and we are being proactive.”

Until this weekend, when deep cleanings were conducted at the Fife and I-5 locations, the casinos had never shut down.

“We are in this together,” Tribal Council said. “Let's share the burden. Let's remember our shared values. Please look out for one another and remember that social distancing does not mean social isolation. Call your loved ones. Stay informed. Stay together – even when we're apart.”

About the Puyallup Tribe of Indians

The Puyallup People have lived along the shores of what is now called Puget Sound since time immemorial. The Puyallup Tribe of Indians is a sovereign nation of more than 5,000 members and one of the largest employers in Pierce County. It serves its people and neighbors with generosity and is committed to building a sustainable way of life for future generations. [Learn more about the Puyallup Tribe.](#)

About the Puyallup Tribal Council

The Puyallup Tribal Council is the elected governing body of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians. The council consists of Chairman David Z. Bean, Vice Chairman Bill Sterud, Sylvia Miller, Tim Reynon, Annette Bryan, James Rideout and Anna Bean.

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