



February 2013

Issues Brief

City of Yakima E-newsletter

City Employee Healthcare Clinic Pioneering Change

Mirroring a trend being set by private companies, the City of Yakima is taking a major step toward reducing the cost of employee healthcare by opening its own in-house clinic. The clinic, located at 103 S. 3rd Street will welcome its first patients Wednesday, February 20th and will be operated by miCare, a subsidiary company of Montana-based Employee Benefits Management Services, Inc., which helps manage in-house clinics for both private and public sector organizations.

Shields Bag and Printing, one of the Yakima area's largest employers, opened a miCare in-house employee healthcare clinic last year. Memorial Hospital provides similar services to its employees.

Yakima is believed to be the first local government entity in Washington State to open its own in-house clinic. The idea had been discussed for several years, but in the face of continuing steep increases in healthcare costs, the City's Employee Welfare Benefit Board decided last fall that it was time to move more aggressively toward opening the clinic.

Backed by the support of the City Council and City management, staff of the City's Human Resources Division has spent the last several months working with miCare to get the clinic up and running.

The City will pay miCare a set rate for operating the clinic. General medical services, such as lab work, prescription medication (which will be dispensed both at the clinic and by mail order), physical exams, etc., will be provided through the clinic. Because the City will pay a set rate to miCare, it will avoid much of the overhead cost its insurance program usually has to pay to private providers.

"After looking at some other pretty bleak options, opening an in-house clinic was an obvious choice to make in order to save money," said City Employee Welfare Benefit Board Chair Randy Tabert. "The board is constantly looking for ways to contain rising medical costs, and the miCare clinic is a great tool we now have to accomplish that goal."

The City estimates that by opening the clinic, it should save its self-funded insurance plan \$326,000 this year, roughly double that amount in 2014, and close to \$2 million over the first three years.

The City's miCare clinic will be staffed by two doctors, a mid-level practitioner, and a medical assistant and will initially operate 26 hours each week providing general medical services, lab work, and prescriptions for eligible City employees, their families, and retirees. The hours of operation of the clinic will likely be expanded as usage of the clinic increases.

MLK, Jr. Blvd. Underpass Project About to Begin

Near the end of February, Mowat Construction Company will begin moving equipment and materials into the area near the BNSF Railroad tracks crossing MLK, Jr. Blvd. in preparation for the start of construction on Yakima's third underpass.

Yakima's first underpass, located on Walnut Avenue, opened in the mid 1950s and was widened in the early 1970s. In May 2012, after about a decade of planning and securing funding and almost two years of construction, the Lincoln Avenue underpass opened.

Mowat, the primary contractor for the MLK, Jr. Blvd. underpass, expects construction on the \$10.6 million project to begin some time in March. Like its sister Lincoln Avenue underpass, funding for the MLK, Jr. Blvd. underpass is coming primarily from state and federal sources.



The Walnut Avenue underpass opened in the mid 1950s and was widened in the early 1970s.

Early in March, Mowat will begin preparing to close MLK, Jr. Blvd. between 1st Avenue and 1st Street. Electronic reader boards will alert drivers about the pending closure. Throughout the project, North Front Street will also be closed between "A" Street and the Lincoln Avenue underpass bridge. While MLK, Jr. Blvd. west of 1st Avenue will remain open to local traffic during construction, eastbound drivers on MLK, Jr. Blvd. will be encouraged to turn right on 5th Avenue and use Yakima Avenue to reach downtown Yakima.

Work on the MLK, Jr. Blvd. underpass is expected to continue until late summer or early fall of next year. Mowat, which is based in Woodinville, has been building public works projects throughout the western United States since its founding in the mid 1960s.



The Lincoln Avenue underpass opened in May 2012.

Both the MLK, Jr. Blvd. underpass and the Lincoln Avenue underpass are designed to improve driver and pedestrian safety, reduce exhaust emissions from cars waiting for trains to pass, and speed response times for police, fire, and other emergency services providers.

Numerous underpasses and overpasses have been built across Washington State since BNSF Railroad reopened the Stampede Pass line in 1997.

Become part of the City of Yakima's social network by following us on the City of Yakima Official Facebook page and the City's Twitter feed. To join, click on the Facebook and Twitter icons on the City website front page - <http://www.yakimawa.gov/>

Smoke Detectors Save Lives, But Only If They're Working

The evidence is undeniable. Smoke detectors save lives. According to the National Fire Protection Association ("NFPA"), your chance of surviving a home fire doubles if your house has working smoke detectors.

The NFPA reports that over a three-year survey period, it found that there were no smoke detectors installed in houses involved in 40% of home fires that resulted in the death of one or more people. That statistic alone is cause for serious concern. What's even more distressing is that another 23% of home fire deaths during the same period took place in houses that DID have at least one smoke detector installed. Confused?

"Obviously, for a smoke detector to do its job, it has to be in working condition," said Yakima Deputy Fire Marshal Brandon Dorenbush. "Unfortunately, too many people disconnect their smoke detector batteries or just don't replace them before they lose their charge," said Dorenbush. "People often disconnect detector batteries because they get annoyed when an alarm is set off by smoke from cooking food or for some other faulty reason," said Dorenbush.

The NFPA says that its research shows that in a full 75% of instances in which smoke detectors did not go off during a home fire, it was because either the batteries were missing, had been disconnected, or were dead.

To minimize so-called "nuisance" alarms caused by cooking fumes or another faulty reason, the NFPA recommends installing smoke detectors that use photoelectric technology. Older detectors use ionization technology and are more susceptible to nuisance alarms caused by smoke from cooking.

"Installing dual sensor detectors is another option," said Dorenbush. "Ionization-based detectors are more responsive to flaming fires and photoelectric-base detectors pick up smoldering fires better. A dual sensor detector uses both ionization and photoelectric technologies," said Dorenbush. "It's the best of both worlds."

Photoelectric detectors cost about \$15.00 a piece, which is only slightly more than the older-style ionization version. A dual sensor detector costs about \$25.00 and provides the best protection possible.

To make sure the batteries in your smoke detectors are properly connected, Dorenbush says you test detectors at least once a month. To be sure the batteries stay fresh, you should change them at least once a year. An easy way to do that, says Dorenbush, is to perform changes the batteries in your detectors on another date you'll remember, like a birthday or an anniversary.



A smoke detector that is properly installed in your house and is working correctly doubles your chance of surviving a home fire.