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Official apologizes for Dumpster remark

■ **Government:** The state welfare agency says it's sorry about a book of financial tips that included trash diving among its suggestions.

By **SUSAN PALMER**
The Register-Guard

A state welfare official apologized Friday for a penny-pinching tip sheet that suggested Dumpster diving to people seeking financial help.

The suggestion was at the bottom of a list of dollar-saving ideas given to people in a budgeting workshop last month in Springfield.

Applicants seeking welfare assistance are

required to take the training workshop. The handout said: "Check the dump and residential/business Dumpsters."

A woman in the session contacted the newspaper to complain about the handout. She said she found it demeaning and that it also upset a woman sitting next to her to the point of tears.

Michael Buckley, welfare manager in the state Adult and Family Services Division in Salem, said he wasn't aware of the material, but

the Dumpster recommendation was insensitive and inappropriate.

"I'm really sorry that happened," he said. "Even if you set aside the message it sends, it wouldn't make any sense as a strategy, and a government agency would never promote it."

The handout isn't part of state literature, Buckley said. Each district designs its screening programs for welfare applicants, he said.

In the Eugene-Springfield area, the screening includes training sessions that help prepare people for job interviews and employment as well as managing their money.

The Dumpster suggestion was on a list excerpted from a book, "1001 Ways to Stretch a

Dollar," and included common money-saving strategies such as "Shop at thrift stores," "Go to garage/yard sales," "Buy in bulk" and "Barter or trade with friends and associates."

John Radich, the Eugene-Springfield district welfare manager, said the workshop was conducted by an independent agency, the Lane Workforce Partnership. He hadn't seen the handout but said the "check the dump" recommendation sent the wrong message to clients.

He said Lane Workforce Partnership usually does high-caliber work.

A program services coordinator at Lane

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Workforce Partnership was surprised Friday to learn of the tip sheet and said it would be removed from the curriculum.

"It's hard to say who's using it. ... We're checking into the source and obviously we'll pull it," Lyle Lang said.

Both Buckley and Lang said their staffs receive special training to be sensitive to the dignity and self-esteem of the clients they serve.

"No one that I know would put something in there purposely," Buckley said.

The woman who complained about the tip sheet said people seeking assistance already feel bad enough about their circumstances.

"You're already at mud-puddle level, and it's like they're saying, 'Now we're going to teach you to roll around in it,'" she said. She asked that her name not be used for fear of losing benefits if she criticized the program.

An anti-poverty lobbyist said the incident reveals the disconnect

between providers and clients.

"I can tell you that families on public assistance know how to budget better than anybody. They're spending down to the penny," said Chuck Sheketoff, director of the Center for Public Policy in Silverton.

"It's one of the examples of the agencies not treating their clientele with the dignity and respect they're due," he said.

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CHUCK SHEKETTOFF
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