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Candy tampering scares parents away from traditional Halloween

By Carolyn Lamberson
Of the Emerald

Halloween used to be considered a child's fantasy when thousands of children would scour their neighborhoods in search of candy and horrors.

But now, the horror of Halloween may have become too real for some parents to take. The increase of product tampering nationwide has caused parents to re-think the concept of trick-or-treating.

More and more, parents are turning to alternative Halloween activities to protect their children, and Christine Donahue, the Neighborhood Liaison for Eugene, feels the change in attitude is significant.

"Activities at schools and community centers have become a real trend in the last several years. People are concerned about children," Donahue said. "They don't like the idea of their children being out at night, and they don't like the whole concept of 'trick-or-treat.'"

Donahue, who is the parent of two middle school-aged children, said she will allow them to trick-or-treat but only at the homes of people she trusts.

"They'll go to the homes of neighbors and close friends, then they are planning to go to a school-sponsored activity," she said.

She said she hasn't noticed a big decline in the number of trick-or-treaters, but now more parents are accompanying their children.

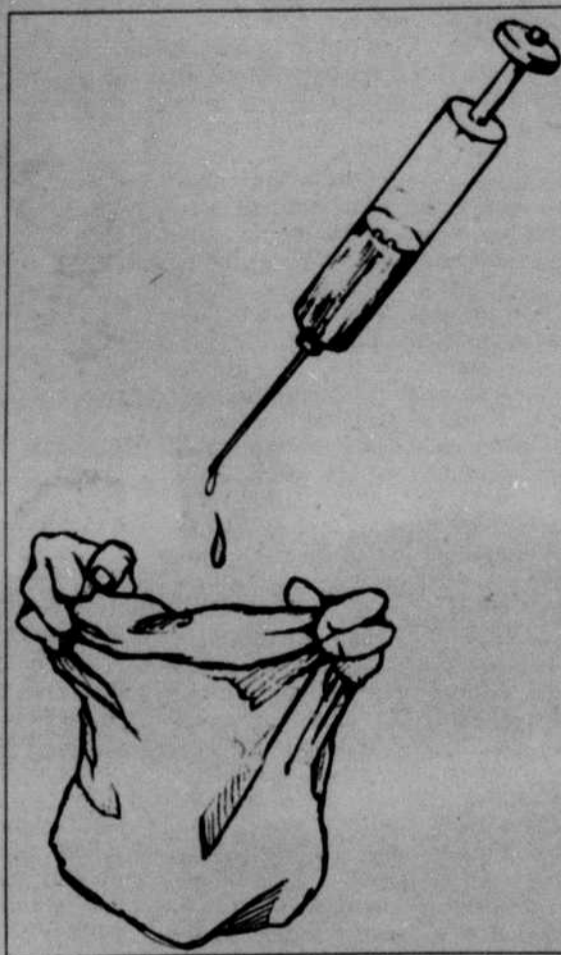
Tim Birr, public information officer for the Eugene Police and Fire Emergency Services Department, said in the past, Halloween in Eugene has generally gone unmarred by candy tampering.

"Frankly in Eugene, the primary hazard is traffic," he said. "Often times, there are children dressed in dark costumes, crossing the streets, and the worse the weather is, the more dangerous the situation becomes."

Birr offered three guidelines for parents who are allowing their children to trick-or-treat:

- Be sure children are wearing light-colored costumes. Costumes should be kept short to avoid tripping, and those wearing loose-flowing garments should be careful because of the potential fire hazard.
- Parents should be careful of masks that impede vision. Face paint and make-up can be a safer alternative.
- Younger children should be taken trick-or-treating in the twilight hours under the supervision of an adult. Also, people are advised only to give and accept individually wrapped candy.

Birr, who is the father of a three-year-old, is allowing his daughter to trick-or-treat, but she also will be staying close to home. "We'll take her out in the neighborhood," he said. "She carved her pumpkin the other night, and she's very



Graphic by Lorraine Rath

excited. It would be hard not to let her trick-or-treat."

In past years, parents could take the collected candy to area hospitals for a free X-ray scan to help detect foreign objects, but the program was discontinued this year.

Mary Sakakibara, a community relations assistant for Sacred Heart General Hospital, said the X-ray is no longer effective because of the increase in the chemical tampering of candy, which an X-ray cannot detect.

She added that Sacred Heart officials have never found many foreign objects in the candy brought in to be X-rayed, and there have been few reported cases of poisoning.

"It's kind of sad that it's not safe to trick-or-treat anymore. It was when I was a kid," she said.

If parents are afraid to allow children to trick-or-treat, there are various other options for celebrating Halloween, said Carrie Matsushita of the Eugene Parks and Recreation Department.

For pre-school-aged children, both the Amazon and Westmoreland community centers are offering Halloween activities. Sheldon Community Center is sponsoring a party and a showing of "Disney's Halloween Treat" for children grades one through five. The Westmoreland Com-

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