

All teens having sex in need of protection

■ **OUR OPINION:** Giving condoms only to kids with STDs solves just part of the problem

In a cautious blow for both pragmatism and disease prevention, the Eugene School Board voted Wednesday to allow school health clinics to distribute condoms to students diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease.

This decision came over the standard objections. Some parents were, as usual, convinced that any distribution of condoms in schools sends the unacceptable message to teens that underage sex, "safe" or not, is endorsed by the school district. But who can hear such a subtle message, if it's really there at all, amid the roar of other pro-sex propaganda, in the media and among the teens themselves?

The thing that made this proposal for distribution succeed where earlier efforts have failed was the promise that condoms would be given only to those already infected with STDs — not to "healthy" students. But this distinction could hardly be more irrational, if the school district thinks handing out condoms promotes sex among minors.

Think about it: If handing out condoms encourages kids to have sex, and withholding them promotes abstinence, then the last people you'd want to give condoms to would be those with diseases. They're the ones who need the abstinence pitch the most, because by having sex, they hurt others as well as themselves.

But no, the district has decided the abstinence angle

won't work with these kids — and they may be right. If these students are going to have sex anyway, the district concedes, they might as well do it with protection. Essentially, the district has realized that its "position" against underage sex will have little influence on the behavior of these students. But what the district does not realize is that uninfected students don't care about the district's "position," either. They want to get some, too.

Why should the school board think teens with STDs are more likely than their uninfected peers to ignore the district's attitude and continue to have sex? Some people contract a disease in a single sexual episode, others have unprotected sex repeatedly without getting anything. Whether someone has an STD is not an accurate measure of that person's ability to refrain from having sex. By creating a double standard based on that premise, the Eugene School Board only perpetuates a harmful myth.

Distributing condoms in school may make sex slightly more appealing to some students, but this society is full of images and attitudes that carry a lot more weight with such people than what the school board says. Against that tide, the district should recognize its weakness and help out the only way it can by distributing condoms to any student responsible enough to ask for them.

Like it or not, this society does approve of sex, no matter what the gray old men of Washington have to say about it. Young people, bent on bedding each other, must have easy access to protection.



Semantics Preserve Software for Li'l Guy

It has been illegal to rent software since the Computer Software Rental Act was passed by Congress in '90, but a loophole in the act enabled stores such as Software Pipeline in Eugene to continue doing business. Under the terms of the Act, software rental businesses were allowed to continue renting old programs already on the shelves, with the stipulation that they gradually faze-out rentals and cross-over to retail. The problem is that no one bothered to make the cross-over.

Stores continued to rent software, and customers continued to engage in a quasi-legitimate form of software pirating. Merchandise that would normally sell for several hundred dollars could be rented for a twenty dollar pittance, permanently installed on a personal hard drive, and returned five days later with a wink and a hand-shake.

Software renters justify their businesses with the argument that consumers have a right to test their software before they purchase it. As with other merchandise, customers must be able to see what they're buying and have the right to return it if it's unacceptable. Unlike other merchandise, however, software enables customers to permanently acquire the product without paying for the dubious privilege of having it legally registered in their name. The realities of software rentals have been an open secret for years.

It's an open secret that makes software companies boil. Companies such as Microsoft lose thousands every year to pirating. They have no way of regulating rentals, and trusting in consumers' integrity to delete the program after 'borrowing' it is a long shot, especially when exorbitant software prices have consumers boiling in turn.

It took the software industry six years, but they've finally done something about it. Two months ago, the Software Publishers Association filed lawsuits against software rental businesses across the country. The Association has a strong case; software rentals are unequivocally illegal, and most everyone acknowledges it.

But in a society fed on democratic principles spiced with a "screw the rich" mentality, multi-million dollar software companies don't get much sympathy from working folk. Student discounts discounted, the retail price of a program like Pagemaker 6.0 is \$500. Nobody seriously interesting in staying abreast of technology comes by his or her software legitimately if it can be avoided.

Once installed on a personal computer, it's impossible for copyright owners to determine if material has been pirated, unless perhaps the computer owner later exposes his or her files to

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electronic registration, (this could be a rumor, but if it's not possible for Microsoft to scan a customer's computer files now, it will be later.) Even then, power cells and portable hard drives can hide all sorts of data from prying eyes.

Many software renters have responded to the lawsuits by further stretching the legal loopholes under which they do business. A local business, Software Pipeline, almost immediately revamped its shelves and modified its sales pitch to accommodate the software industry's scrutiny. Officially, Software Pipeline no longer rents software; instead, it offers to sell its software with a 100 percent money-back guarantee.

Now, the shiny new software packages on Software Pipeline's shelves come with stickers warning customers that the product may have been previously used. The price tags that once advertised cheap rental prices have been replaced by a discrete warning that returned merchandise will be subject to a 10 percent "restocking fee." Calculated out, the 10 percent fee is equal to the price Software Pipeline formerly charged for its rentals.

Under the new subterfuge, customers "purchase" the entire product, complete with books, toll-free assistance numbers and shiny boxes. The business is remarkably forthright about its retail transition; each sale is accompanied by the smiling, winking guarantee that you'll be back before your five-day trial period lapses.

Simply by fudging with the semantics of the retail contract, software rental businesses can circumvent the Computer Software Rental Act indefinitely. How one feels about this will probably depend on whether or not you're Bill Gates, but I'm betting most democratically-minded citizens will be fine with it. It's unethical, it's illegal and it's irresponsible, but darn it, have you looked at those retail prices? The software rental business may be armed with semantic loopholes, but these are little guns compared to the killing software manufacturers make via annual upgrades, built-in obsolescence, and advancing technology that leaves customers scrambling to keep up. Let software rental businesses and their customers eat cake.

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