

Police: Mace used in rare instances

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While some students may think of police only as party busters, officers have another perspective. The line drawn between police and college students is not as cut-and-dry as some may think.

Williams works the Friday and Saturday night late shift. His shift starts at about 6 p.m. and he stays on until 3:30 a.m., the prime time for student parties. Not every party results in a citation, however; it often depends upon how cooperative the hosts are.

A party that occurred last Friday near 17th Avenue and Hilyard Street at about 11:45 p.m. had over sixty people and a number of kegs, said Williams. Officers were called by a neighbor complaining about the noise. However, because the owners of the house were cooperative, no citations were issued.

Many of the parties to which the officers are called simply result in a warning and a discussion with the party's hosts. They discuss the laws that the hosts are in danger of breaking and some tips for keeping things under control. Williams said that every party he comes across is different, and he approaches them differently.

He said he makes it a general practice to go to the bigger parties before they get underway to try to prevent anyone from getting arrested. What he calls a "preemptive party strike" consists of letting the host know about the noise ordinance and the drinking laws, and generally warning him or her that police will be patrolling in the area and are aware that there is a party at that location.

"I once had to chase a horse that escaped from the fairgrounds all through the city. I called in and said, 'I am in pursuit of a horse.'"

— Officer Steve Williams
Eugene Police Department

"I like to go and talk to them first and let them deal with it. That way I don't have to go back," Williams said. "I don't have to write any tickets because it's a minor city ordinance, but it's annoying for someone who is trying to go to sleep."

Some parties get out of control and necessitate citations and charges being made. The two most frequent charges Officer Williams says he has to make are MIPs (minor in possession) and prohibited noise.

Parties are the most prevalent problem that William faces; however, officers encounter a wide variety of situations while patrolling. The majority, according to Williams, include alcohol in some way. Not all situations do, however. They range from bar fights to domestic problems and even to runaway horses.

"I once had to chase a horse that escaped from the fairgrounds all through the city," laughs Williams. "I called in and said, 'I am in pursuit of a horse.'"

Williams chased the horse down several city blocks on 11th Avenue with overhead lights flashing. The horse was finally detained long enough for the owners

to come and transport it back to the fairgrounds.

Alcohol can fuel altercations and turn them into fights and make a lot of people do things they wouldn't normally do, Williams said. One call he responded to involved a man that "got into an altercation with a couple of guys and came back after it was finished with a rifle strapped to his shoulder. Was he going to shoot anyone? I don't know. He was so drunk, and without his glasses he couldn't see very well, so I don't know what he would have hit," Williams said. The man was disarmed and no shots were fired, but he was charged with felony possession of a firearm.

Bar fights, according to Williams, usually start to develop around 2 a.m. or 2:30 a.m. when the bars close. When people leave the bars, they usually have had at least a few drinks, and fights often break out, Williams said. All EPD officers carry mace in case a situation gets out of control.

Williams described a number of situations last year that occurred at local bars in which he had to use the mace to prevent officers from getting physically injured. The mace is used, according to Williams, when the suspects involved won't respond to the officers' demands.

The patrol cars are also equipped with a shotgun locked above the front seats and a computer that can give an officer a great deal of information quickly. The computers alert officers to calls that are coming in and can give personal information about suspects and automobiles.

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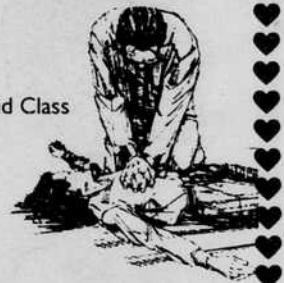
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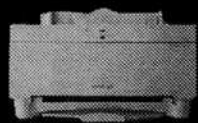
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