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ACT UP

This space is the newsletter for ACT UP! Portland and is made possible by a grant from the McKenzie River Foundation and Just Out

ACT UP Portland hits two years

It's been two years. ACT UP Portland has been tweaking noses, generating debate and making some changes happen for two years now. Have we pissed you off? Have we disrupted 'mainstream' life? Have we made you stop and think? Have we got you talking about AIDS issues, about the lack of government action or concern, about condoms? Have we pointed out the criminal state of health care in the U.S., the censorship by this state's major newspaper, the hypocrisy of certain government officials? We damn well hope we have.

True, we've had a rough and tumble relationship with you these past two years. These are desperate times. When we began agitating in December '88, there had been 52 AIDS-related deaths reported in Oregon. This state now has 1,000 plus AIDS cases. ACT UP Portland has had to push beyond the boundaries of Portland's relaxed "live-and-let-live" philosophy. You don't live long these days by being polite. There are no apologies for stirring up this complacent burg.

And we've only begun. The AIDS crisis looks to be here for a long time, thanks to society's reluctance to act immediately; ACT UP Portland is here for the haul.

January ushers in a new energy and focus within ACT UP Portland. Internally, we have recently made a commitment to a stronger democratic group process and to a greater validation of and attention to women and people of color concerns. After two years we continue to have a dynamic and active membership. Despite the widespread rumors of a split or breakup of ACT UP Portland, the group is actually much sounder, stronger and more efficient after the loud resignation of two former members. Our focus is again fully on the fight outside, not inside, the group.

ACT UP Portland is committed to addressing and fighting the AIDS-related issues that are consistently overlooked and actively denied by

society. Look at our plans for an on-the-street and visible IV needle exchange program. Notice our call for expanding the Centers for Disease Control's definition of AIDS-related illnesses to include typical infections that occur in women living with HIV, so they have equal access to resources that men living with AIDS have. See our participation in the call for universal health care. We will continue the fight with drug companies, with unresponsive press and government agencies, and with homophobic and racist institutions and individuals. Why don't you join the fight? Help us end these AIDS-related messes sooner; they won't go away on their own. Take your anger and ACT UP! Do what you can.

Activists block Burnside Bridge

About 50 AIDS activists blocked traffic for a half hour on the Burnside Bridge during rush hour on Dec. 3, National AIDS Awareness Day. The demonstration was staged to draw attention to the fact that 1000 Oregonians have been diagnosed with AIDS, while AIDS prevention, education and treatment services remain grossly underfunded. Large signs demanding health care for all and stating facts about women and AIDS were held in view of the slowly passing motorists. The police set a time limit for the demonstration, after which everyone was told to move to the side of the street. Three protestors had to be forcibly removed by police, but were not arrested.

In spite of the ongoing negotiations between the lesbian and gay community and the Portland Police Department in the spirit of fostering cultural sensitivity and AIDS awareness, several officers present at the protest were wearing rubber gloves. When asked why they needed the gloves, they responded that they wanted to protect themselves from AIDS. Although they were told that they could not catch AIDS from touching a person with AIDS, they persisted in wearing the gloves, and made sarcastic and insulting remarks.

On the same day, demonstrations took place all over the nation. In Atlanta, 600 people demonstrated at the Centers for Disease Control, demanding that the CDC change the definition of AIDS to include opportunistic infections specific to women. Members of the People with Immune Disorders caucus of ACT UP chained themselves

together in front of the main building, where 40 people were eventually arrested. Another 49 were arrested in the office of the head of the HIV/AIDS division. Women's Health Action Mobilization (WHAM) held a teach-in about how women differ from men, and how AIDS affects women differently.

No more lip service! Take to the streets!

Take action on the day of Bush's State of the Union Address. ACT UP Portland will join all other ACT UPs around the world for our most ambitious demonstration in history. The day is to be called "Day of Desperation." The day is designed to bring AIDS to the forefront of the discussion. It is meant to show we are desperate, we are becoming bigger and more powerful, and we are more willing than ever to put our bodies on the lines. We'll protest to counter government rhetoric that AIDS is a manageable condition. We know AIDS is not manageable. It is a fucking nightmare. It is getting worse and there is no one in charge of this mess. This action is meant to be a preemptive strike at Bush. We all know that no matter what he says in his State of the Union address, it is lip service. At the time of this writing the exact date has not yet been announced, but CALL US for more details and look for flyers near the end of January. We will be holding a civil disobedience workshop for those interested in participating. ACT UP!

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