

around five to eight years for a Class B felony and three to five years for a Class C. Sentencing varies according to extenuating circumstances, which could lengthen or shorten the sentence, especially for cases in which children are involved.

Many felons don't serve their entire sentence because of Oregon's budget crisis. The Portland Police Bureau admits it doesn't have the manpower to go after users. Instead, it focuses its limited resources on meth sales and distribution. And even here budget cuts don't allow overtime investigative hours or needed equipment.

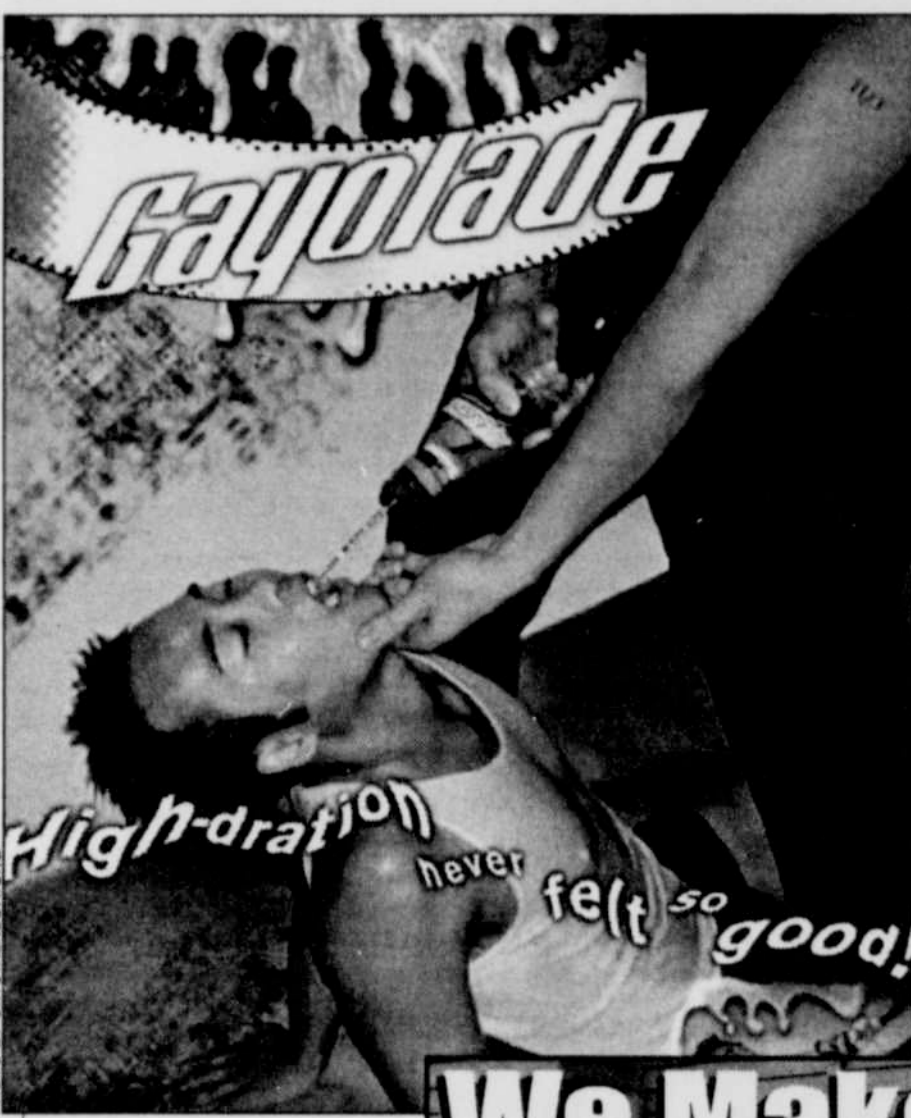
Meth does some rotten things to the body. Its worst effect is to damage the brain's neurotransmitters. This damage can heal a little if using stops, but recent studies have shown that that may not be enough to make up for natural losses in those neurotransmitters that come with the normal aging process. Long-term use affects the user's skin, producing pock marks and "crank bugs," which come from an itchy feeling just under the skin that causes users to scratch until they bleed. Meth also constricts the blood supply to the teeth and gums, causing nasty oral health problems. Studies show that long-term meth use can adversely affect the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys and digestive system. It can cause dehydration and malnutrition just by keeping people up and partying for days on end. Long-term users often end up with high levels of paranoia and psychosis.

The most ravaging effects of meth use in the sexual minorities community, however, may not be the physical effects of the drug itself.

"Crystal meth is the biggest problem that gay men in Portland face," says Knowlton. "It's most certainly the cause of our spiked HIV and STD rates, as well as a link in the chain regarding the renewed popularity of bathhouses, public sex and Internet hookups—the whole party-and-play thing, being high all weekend and just looking for as many sex partners as you can have."

And here statistics prove it.

Robert Carroll, education coordinator for



To date this year, Multnomah County reports 31 new cases of syphilis, 23 of which are among MSM. Of these, eight are known to be HIV-positive, as well. Multnomah County minces no words and calls this a "syphilis epidemic."

"I probably would not have been unsafe if I wasn't high," says meth user Wade. "Meth was the reason the experience happened. It took away my inhibitions and allowed me to engage in unsafe sex because getting laid was more important than the consequences."

Area health organizations are fighting meth with all their resources. Outside In, for instance, works with at-risk youth to get them into treatment. Recognizing that many people will use no matter what, counselors teach harm reduction—tactics to reduce as much as possible the harmful effects of meth. Simple things, such as staying well hydrated.

Staff and volunteers at CAP hand out posters and brochures. They do one-on-one outreach, individual coaxing and coaching. They also teach harm reduction to meth users. Recently, Multnomah County awarded a contract to CAP to build and distribute a major meth campaign including posters, brochures and a 'zine. The message isn't lost on Knowlton. He says, "It shows how bad the meth problem is in Portland that the county is willing to shell out this money in these economic times."

Meth also happens to be one of the hardest drugs to kick and one of the easiest on which to grow psychologically dependent.

Continued on Page 30



Ads from Seattle's CrystalNeon.org Amphetamine publication (left and top left) use humor to promote harm reduction, while posters from San Francisco's Tweaker.org (top right) and Washington County Sheriff's Office (above) take a more daunting approach

University of Washington's Northwest AIDS Education and Training Center, reports that a staggering 47 percent of MSM meth injectors in Seattle/King County are HIV-positive. "This is the highest HIV prevalence in Washington state," he says. "This rate is two times the rate of MSM who do not shoot meth, and it's 12 to 16 times the rate of Seattle/King County heterosexual drug injectors." And in case you think you're safe because you don't inject, Carroll reminds, "The primary route of HIV transmission in these cases is sexual."

"Just log onto a chat room," Knowlton says. "Read all the lines about PNP [party-

and-play]. It started with tweaking and forgetting a condom and, 'Oh well, stick it in anyway.' But now it's almost expected in party-and-play. It's expected that if you party and you're tweaking, you will have bareback [no- condom] sex."

In Portland's MSM community, syphilis rates are through the roof. The Multnomah County Health Department reports that 18 of 2002's 38 new syphilis cases were among MSM. Of these, 50 percent were also HIV-positive, 90 percent were older than 30, and 100 percent reported meeting partners via the Internet, bathhouses, bars or adult bookstores.

SHAMROCK LODGETTES

HALF-PRICE ROOM SPECIAL!
(Nov 1-March 18, Sun-Thurs, exceptions apply, no holidays)

Oceanfront • Log Cabins • Rooms
Wood Fireplaces • Kitchenettes
5 Beautiful Acres • 19 Units • Pets

Yachats Oregon
800-845-5028 • 541-547-3312
www.shamrocklodgettes.com

Automotive Maintenance & Repair

AT ITS BEST!

ALL FOREIGN & DOMESTIC AUTOMOBILES
QUALIFIED, HONEST, QUICK & FAIRLY PRICED
SATISFIED CUSTOMERS TELL THEIR FRIENDS
— **THEY ALL COME BACK!**
(references on file)

AUTO-MARINE
4230 NE SUMNER ST.
503-282-0159

OUR PLANTS ARE 6
ON THE KINSEY SCALE

CISTUS NURSERY
22711 NW GILLIHAN ROAD
SAUVIE ISLAND WED-SUN 10-5

it's ME!
wigs

breast forms, bras & more!
• Cinchers • Gaffs • Padded Panties
trans friendly
susan johnson owner/fitter
2041 ne burnside, gresham
503/491-5110 ~ www.shopitsme.com