



PHOTOS BY JOE GLODE

Volunteers Sam Junge and Wren Ronan talk with a client who's picking up a new sharps container, used for safely disposing of used needles, as part of Portland People's Outreach Project's volunteer-run syringe exchange. PPOP is launching a new program to distribute meth pipes.

Meth pipe project comes to Portland

Volunteers say distributing meth pipes should cut down on injection and disease transmission

BY EMILY GREEN
STAFF WRITER

In the back room of an anarchist book shop in North Portland, past a rack of zines and chalkboard list of upcoming punk shows, volunteers with the Portland People's Outreach Project set up shop each Saturday afternoon.

On Friday evenings, they make rounds on their bicycles, making deliveries to people sleeping under bridges downtown and to drug users hanging out within inner East Portland.

These 10 volunteers, most of whom are former or current drug users, offer free syringes, hygiene kits, socks and, starting Jan. 15, meth pipes to Portland area drug users.

While it's rumored that a handful of other U.S. syringe exchanges unofficially offer meth pipes to their clients, the move to do so publicly will make the Portland metro area the second region in the nation, after Washington's King County, with an official meth pipe program.

Portland police, Sgt. Pete Simpson

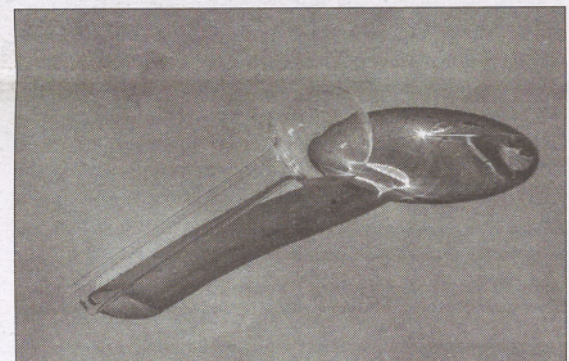
recommended that anyone planning to hand out free meth pipes have a lawyer review the law to determine if they are open to legal penalties.

Oregon's paraphernalia statute still prohibits the sale or delivery of items such as "water pipes" and other mechanisms for smoking marijuana — along with all other items used for consuming drugs. The only exception is hypodermic syringes or needles. Head shops and corner stores in Portland have been openly selling paraphernalia, including meth pipes, for years.

"As far as enforcement," Simpson said, "I can't say we would or would not take enforcement actions. It's all dependent on calls for service."

Volunteers at Portland People's Outreach Project said that by offering meth smokers clean pipes, they will reduce the spread of diseases such as Hepatitis C and prevent some meth smokers from moving to a far more dangerous form of consumption — injection.

But most important, the volunteers said,



Street Roots purchased this glass meth pipe for \$5 at a convenience store about a mile east of PPOP's Saturday afternoon syringe exchange.

they will be showing an ostracized group of people "love" by telling them they want them to be the best person they can be — and that might mean being the best drug user they can be.

More than the actual distribution of pipes, "it's about treating drug users with compassion and respect," said Sam Junge, a community health worker who's been with PPOP (pronounced "P-pop") since its inception 11 months ago. "Other places will give you that compassion, but it's contingent on being sober."

PPOP is a branch of Seattle-based People's Harm Reduction Alliance, which has been handing out meth pipes since February. As of December, it had distributed 5,781 meth pipes in urban and rural King County through its pre-established syringe exchange program. It's providing the funding for the first year of PPOP's meth pipe program in Portland, which is roughly \$3,000.

People's Harm Reduction Alliance recently announced it would open the

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