

Andrew Mills – Chief of Police – Santa Cruz

If we cannot change the environment to suit us, we must change to suit the environment –
Gen. McCrystal

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Needle Exchange Programs



I received inquiries from community members regarding needle exchange and harm reduction strategies. Police officers are exposed daily to dirty needles. Frequently our officers receive needle sticks as people try to hide them in clothing, backpacks, and tents. Police officers have a lot at stake in promulgating thoughtful policy regarding needles. Separating fact from fiction is important in creating that policy. Consider these facts:

From March 2015 through February 2017, the (County of Santa Cruz) SSP: (County HSA web portal)

- Served 1,133 unduplicated clients;
- Dispensed 597,567 new syringes;
- Collected 823,910 used syringes (235,275 syringes from the three kiosks, and 588,635 from the onsite exchange); and
- 64% of clients were given additional education and/or referral to medical care, HIV/Hepatitis C testing or drug treatment.

Harm Reduction (<https://www.drugrehab.com/2017/11/06/pros-and-cons-of-needle-exchange-programs/>) makes sense from a public health, public finance and community safety policy perspective. Reducing the number of HIV/AIDS and Hep C cases in a community of high intravenous drug users are wise. The thought being fewer cases of disease equals fewer exposures.

Let's be honest, syringe litter is a problem. Any proposal to distribute additional needles must include a method to further reduce needle litter. While some research indicates that needle exchange, distribution, and collection can reduce **needle litter** (http://santacruzcountyca.ig2.com/Citizens/Detail_LegiFile.aspx?Frame=&MeetingID=1581&MediaPosition=11166.038&ID=3653&CssClass), we see

discarded needles frequently in Santa Cruz. We have collected needles out of parks, beaches, and the river. The reason – as one former addict told me, possession of needles for drug use is no longer a crime and they are easy to obtain. Once used, they lack value.

One strategy is to make it unlawful to possess or use a syringe in a park, on the beach or near a school. Another suggestion is to offer a redemption value for turning in syringes. At .05 cents apiece, 400,000 needles would cost \$20,000.

For a needle distribution volunteer program to be acceptable and have the confidence of the community, county oversight, and community accountability is important. An important question: does the risk of increased infection, death by overdose and discarded needles warrant expansion in Santa Cruz?

I cannot support a needle exchange expansion without local oversight and accountability, a plan to reduce discarded needles and ensuring the effectiveness of reducing infection rates. When these standards are met, I'll gladly support a harm reduction program expansion.

Then maybe we can address the real problem...addiction.



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