

"The Risks of the Job" - Law Enforcement and Needle Exchange (2008)

Producer - Gretchen Hildebran

Length - 13:30

Made with the cooperation of the Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles needle exchange programs, and funded by the California Department of Public Health, Office of AIDS, this short educational documentary explains how officers can reduce the risk of infection by needlestick injury on the job. Police officers visit needle exchange programs on their beat and explore the ways that needle exchange programs help keep law enforcement officers and their communities safer.

This training video is designed to be used by health departments, AIDS service organizations and syringe exchange programs (SEPs) to provide education to local law enforcement during police roll call training sessions. The video can be used by the law enforcement agency on its own; however it is more useful if presented by someone familiar with and able to answer questions about local programs.

Roll call training sessions are very short, often less than twenty minutes. *The Risks of the Job* runs slightly more than 13 minutes, which means that presenters should be prepared to answer questions and provide additional information succinctly.

The video itself covers many of the points that would be made in a presentation on syringe exchange. Additional information a presenter may want to cover includes:

- Number of local SEPs, type (indoor, outdoor) and locations, and a schedule of these sites and times if appropriate;
- Existence, if any, of agreements between SEPs and local law enforcement;
- Existence, if any, of I.D. cards for program participants;
- What clients are told: the rules of conduct for SEP clients;
- How police officers or sheriff's deputies can help or may hurt the program.

This last point is perhaps the most important: before the training, the presenter needs to have a clear and concise idea of what is needed and wanted from local law enforcement. Some things SEPs have asked for, and received from local law enforcement include:

- No police cruising in the immediate neighborhood during exchange hours;
- No confiscation of syringes, naloxone or sharps/disposal containers;

- A contact person in the police department such as a Community Liaison Officer who is familiar with SEPs, or is willing to convey information and requests back and forth between the law enforcement department and local SEPs;
- Police carrying SEP cards in order to refer people to SEP services.

Many presenters bring to the roll call examples of the items dispensed at the program, such as syringes and other safer injecting supplies, pamphlets and educational materials. It's also important to bring an example of whatever form of naloxone the program distributes, and to explain why it should not be confiscated.

Complexities of the Law

One aspect of syringe exchange that is not covered by the video are the complexities of local (city and county) law. In most California counties SEP participants are allowed to possess up to 10 sterile syringes, under a law which allows pharmacists to sell syringes without a prescription or I.D. The law allows individuals to possess up to 10 syringes, if "acquired from an authorized source." Prior to that legislation, although SEP staff were protected by law, SEP participants were not given the same legal protection.

SEPs are allowed by law to dispense more than 10 syringes at a time to an individual, and often do. This quirk in the law can be confusing for SEP clients, staff and police. It can be worthwhile to explain to law enforcement personnel why possession of syringes, *including a large number of syringes*, is helpful for disease prevention and can decrease "traffic" at the SEP.

Additionally, individuals anywhere in the state are allowed by law to possess syringes that have been containerized for disposal. There are no limits on the number of containerized syringes that an individual may possess: this provision was designed to encourage safe disposal of syringes.

More information about this aspect of California law is available in two other handouts available at www.syringeaccess.com: "*Fact Sheet on Syringe Exchange Programs for Law Enforcement*" and "*CA Legal Code for Syringe Exchange Programs*."