office of neighborhood involvement

Enhancing the quality of neighborhoods through community participation

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This document is available at the ONI website:
www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/cp

Recognizing & Responding to Illegal Drug Activity

Office of Neighborhood Involvement Crime Prevention Program
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Illegal drug activity can include drug use, sales, and/or manufacturing. These activities, alone or in combination, can cause serious safety and livability problems in a neighborhood.

This information sheet covers how to recognize illegal drug activity and how to respond if you have these problems on your street. This and other crime prevention information sheets are available at *www.portlandonline.com/oni/cp*.

What illegal drugs do people use in Portland? How can I learn more about them?

Illegal drugs commonly used in the Portland area include methamphetamine, cocaine and crack cocaine, heroin, marijuana, hallucinogens, and club drugs. The Partnership for a Drug Free America has extensive information on their website (*www.drugfree.org*) about these and other drugs- what they look like, how they are used, their effects, and slang terms for them.

Illegal drug activity affects us all

Drug activity has a major negative impact on everyone in our society, not just on drug abusers themselves and their families and friends:

- Death, injury, and illness from overdoses and the short- and long-term effects of drugs
- Increased crime and fear of crime, causing people to withdraw from community life
- Abuse and neglect of children and seniors, aggravation of domestic violence, drug-related homicides and assaults
- Damage to property from neglect, contamination, fires, and explosions
- Increased burdens on the law enforcement and corrections systems
- Increased burdens on social service and treatment providers
- Increased burdens on schools and the foster care system from drug-affected children
- Burdens on employers from increased workplace accidents and loss of worker productivity
- Contamination of natural areas

If you are a parent, a student, a homeowner or renter, a taxpayer, an employer or employee, a user of the healthcare system, a driver, a landlord, or just about any other role you have in life, you ARE affected by illegal drug activity.

What does a drug abuser look like?

Drug abusers can come from any walk of life and the severity of their problem could range from mild to severe. You can't always tell who abuses illegal drugs by looking at them. However, serious and long-term abusers of meth, crack, and heroin tend to look exhausted and underweight, and have skin lesions and dental problems. Meth and crack abusers tend to be aggressive, agitated, anxious, and irritable.

How to recognize sales and manufacturing of illegal drugs

Some of the activities listed below, especially happening alone, may have a reasonable explanation. For example, frequent visits to a house might simply mean that a large and sociable family lives there. However, in combination, the activities below could mean that you are seeing illegal drug activity. Sometimes sales and manufacturing happen in the same location, and sometimes not.

Am I seeing drug sales?

Drug sales may happen at a home, a business, or in a public place, such as a street or a park.

Possible signs of drug sales

- Numerous short visits to the location by people in vehicles, on bicycles, and/or on foot
- Money or small packages being exchanged
- Cars frequently drive slowly by the location
- Visitors often bring personal property and leave without it
- People who appear to be acting as lookouts
- Activity at the location happens at odd hours such as in the middle of the night or early in the morning
- Occupants seem paranoid, unfriendly, or secretive
- Shades or blinds are constantly drawn, even though a house is occupied
- Unusually extensive security measures around a house
- Inconsistent displays of financial status, such as a very expensive car belonging to someone living in a very modest, run-down home
- Drug paraphernalia at or near the location, such as: very small zip-lock plastic baggies; small bundled or twisted pieces of cellophane; small pieces of balloon; hypodermic needles and needle caps; broken automobile antennae; small glass vials or pipes; or small pieces of brillo pads
- Elevated levels of crime in the surrounding area, such as burglaries, car prowls, and identity theft

Am I seeing drug manufacturing?

Until 2006, most drug manufacturing in Portland was methamphetamine. Meth labs were commonly set up in rental homes and apartments, motel rooms, garages, storage sheds or barns, and cars and RVs. A 2006 law making pseudoephedrine, the active ingredient in meth, unavailable without a prescription drastically reduced the number of meth labs in Oregon. However, they still exist here and there.

Possible signs of meth manufacturing

- Many of the signs listed above under drug sales
- Garbage containing large amounts of cold medication packaging; jugs of chemicals such as denatured alcohol, muriatic acid, automotive products, or camping fuel; matchbooks or road flares; drain opener; salt; iodine; or batteries
- Pyrex dishes, funnels, mason jars, tubing, propane tanks, coolers, and coffee filters that are stained a red, orange, or yellow color
- Chemical odors coming from the property (ether, ammonia, solvent,

or vinegar-type smells)

- Activity seems to happen on a cyclical basis, e.g. every Sunday, meth is cooked, and every Tuesday someone comes and picks it up

Clean up of meth labs

Do not enter a meth lab, and never touch anything at a suspected meth lab or meth dump. Meth labs are extermely toxic. Meth lab clean up is a fairly lengthy process that requires coordination between a number of governmental agencies. For more information about the clean up process, and to see a current list of not-yet-cleaned meth labs that are deemed unfit for use, visit: *www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/druglab/*

Marijuana grows & medical marijuana

Marijuana grow operations are fairly common in Portland. Signs of a marijuana grow include: extremely high use of electricity; a skunk-like odor; secret rooms within a house; very bright lights seen through cracks in closed blinds or curtains; and extensive security measures.

Some marijuana grows are not a violation of state law. In 1998, Oregon voters approved the Oregon Medical Marijuana Act, which allows certain qualifying patients to legally grow and use marijuana to treat their chronic health conditions. As of April 2010, there are about 5,800 medical marijuana card holders in Multnomah County. For more information, contact the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program, administered by the state's Department of Human Services. Phone: 971-673-1234. Website: *www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/ommp/*

Prescription drug abuse: Illegal and dangerous use of legal drugs

The use of prescription drugs to get high is an increasingly common problem, especially among teens and young adults. Narcotic painkillers, tranquilizers, and stimulants are particularly favored for illegal nonmedical use. Prescription drugs are present in most homes, making them widely available. Some people may also have the perception that using these drugs is safer than illegal drugs because they were prescribed by a doctor. However, using prescription drugs for any purpose and by any person other than for whom they were prescribed is a very dangerous practice and is illegal. Prescription drugs can be just as addictive and intoxicating as illegal drugs.

There are steps you can take to reduce the chances that your legitimate prescriptions will be misused. Store the drugs in a secure place, perhaps even locked up if they are among the most abused substances. As soon as you are done with a prescription, dispose of any remaining drugs appropriately. Do not flush them down the toilet, a practice that can contaminate natural waterways. Instead, dissolve pills in a small amount of water, then pour the mixture on clumping cat litter. After the clumps dry, throw them away.

For more information, visit the National Institutes of Health Medline website at *www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/* and enter "prescription drug abuse" into the search field.

What is a "drug house?"
A location where illegal drugs are being sold, made, or heavily used.

Responding to illegal drug activity

If you think you *are* seeing drug sales or manufacturing on your street, here are some suggestions for how to work on the problem. This information is based on experience gained from successful efforts solving drug house problems in our city.

Report the problem and ask for help

Police

Call *9-1-1* or the *police non-emergency number* (503-823-3333), depending on the urgency of the immediate situation, to report incidents of danger or illegal activity. Other units within the police bureau can help with the longer-term effort of solving the problem:

- Each precinct has a *Neighborhood Response Team* (NRT) consisting of officers who work on chronic problem locations in areas to which they are assigned. Call 503-823-4000 to get the contact information for your NRT officer.
- Sometimes the *Drugs & Vice Division* (DVD) gets involved and does an investigation. They also take complaints about suspected drug houses at 503-823-DRUG.

Be patient. Suspicious activity alone does not mean the police can shut down a suspected drug house. Only after the police have gathered enough reliable information about a problem location will they be able to get a search warrant to go in and look for evidence that could lead to prosecution. This process can take months or even longer.

When reporting, it helps to provide your name and phone number. While an anonymous tip is better than none, a tip from an identifiable resident is more credible and may receive priority. The police do a good job of keeping complainant names confidential– there is little chance that providing your name to the police will expose you to danger. An anonymous tip, on the other hand, severely limits how the police can respond to your complaint.

Crime Prevention

Your *Crime Prevention Program Coordinator* (CPPC) can help you organize your neighbors, teach you how to document and report illegal and suspicious activity, teach you how to protect your property and family, and advise you throughout the problem-solving process. To find your CPPC, call 503-823-4000.

Housing Inspectors

Sometimes, the *Neighborhood Inspections Team* (NIT) can help shut down a drug house by issuing citations and liens for violations of housing code. It is very common for drug houses to have multiple code violations. Call 503-823-CODE if you think your problem location might have housing code violations. Be sure to warn them that you think the location is a drug house so they can take proper safety precautions.

Landlord

If the suspected drug house is a rental property, you might have success if you complain to the landlord. If you are having problems with their tenant, they probably are too. Your complaint may be just the thing they need to decide to evict the tenants, and eviction is often the fastest solution. You can find out who the landlord is by calling the Multnomah

County Division of Assessment, Recording, and Taxation at 503-988-3326, or by visiting *www.portlandmaps.com*.

Work with your neighbors

Your chances of eliminating a drug house are best if you work with other neighbors who are seeing the problem activity too. Credible, valid reporting by groups of neighbors gets the best and fastest results, and reduces chances of retaliation. Contact the neighbors you feel comfortable with and set up a meeting to discuss the problem and make a plan. The Crime Prevention Coordinator in your area can help you with this effort, and help the group set up a Neighborhood Watch.

Document everything

Document the problem and your problem-solving efforts meticulously.

- *Report every significant incident to the police* and request that a report be written even if they cannot establish that a crime was committed. The creation of these reports helps track and legitimize the problem. Ask police and crime prevention for advice about what kinds of things should be reported immediately, and what kinds of things should simply be recorded in a log and turned in periodically.
- *Keep a log of the suspected drug activity* that you observe. You can use the form on the last page of this document, create your own, or get an electronic version from your CPPC. Regularly turn in your logs of observed drug activity, keeping copies for yourself. These logs can help establish patterns of activity and who is involved, and under certain circumstances and in conjunction with other investigative tools, these logs can be used to get search warrants. The logs should be turned into your NRT officer, an officer from the Drugs & Vice Division, or your CPPC. Be sure to discuss with them whether the way you are filling out the log is giving them the information they most need for the particular situation.
- *Keep a detailed record of every contact you make to get help*- every phone call, every letter, every email, and every meeting. Once you have established a communication link with a helpful bureau contact, keep it. Note the person's name and try to call the same person every time you make a complaint.

Be polite, patient, and persistent

Getting rid of illegal drug activity on your street is a process that takes time. It can feel discouraging when the system doesn't swoop in and immediately eliminate the problem for you. Don't give up! These kinds of problems CAN be alleviated by well-organized neighbors working hand in hand with the police and other public agencies.

Look at the big picture

What are the social conditions that exist in your neighborhood or the metro area as a whole that contributed to the problem in the first place? It may give you a sense of well-being and greater effectiveness to tackle those issues after your immediate problem is solved. You might try volunteer work at a school, treatment facility, or job-training center, testifying before the City Council or the County Commission, or lobbying legislators to get more dollars for enforcement, treatment, and prevention.

Logging suspected illegal activity (Tell police and/or crime prevention that you are logging. Turn in logs on a regular basis, keeping copies for yourself.)

Describing people: Take note of sex, race, age, height, weight, hair, complexion, piercings, scars, tattoos, glasses, facial hair, clothing, and anything else that would help police find the person. If you don't have time to note all of these, pay the most attention to things the person cannot change. They can quickly change out of their clothing, but they can't quickly remove a tattoo or scar, or change their weight. If you know the person's name, use it.

Describing vehicles: The license plate is the most important piece of information. Take note of the license plate and the direction in which the vehicle was travelling. Then, note color, make, year, body style, and any other identifying characteristics such as dents or bumperstickers.

Describing activities: Give as much detail as you possibly can. For example: "I saw a person take a small orange colored object out of their mouth and hand it to another person. The second person handed the first person money, which the first person put in their pants pocket," is much more useful than: "I saw a person dealing drugs."

If you see anything that is clearly dangerous or life-threatening, or you have strong suspicions of either, call 9-1-1 immediately.

Address of location:

Date	Time in/ time out	Repeat visitor? Y/N	Vehicle	Person(s)	Activity

Logged by (name & phone): Turned in to: On (date):