

## Safe-injection site tries to sway gov't: Backers of **Insite** erect crosses to draw attention to renewing exemption

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VANCOUVER - In the past 18 months, 336 drug users overdosed at **Insite**, Vancouver's **safe-injection** facility. None of the junkies died, thanks to quick responses from trained staff.

Yesterday, the facility's supporters erected rows of wooden crosses at Kitsilano's Vanier Park to illustrate the hundreds of lives they say will be put at risk if Ottawa closes the facility.

The crosses represented the 336 overdoses at the facility between March 1, 2004, to Aug. 30, 2005.

"**Insite** is helping to make our community safer and saving lives," said Gillian Maxwell, a spokeswoman for **Insite** for Community Safety.

**Insite**, North America's first supervised injection site, opened in the Downtown Eastside in September 2003. Health Canada issued it a three-year exemption from Canada's narcotics law to allow drug users to safely inject.

With a Sept. 12 deadline for extending the agreement looming, supporters are worried. "**Insite** is making a big difference and we need politicians to know that," said Maxwell, who said that fewer people are injecting in public and tossing dirty needles in the city's parks and on the streets.

The RCMP did not support the original exemption and doesn't endorse any initiatives that promote drug use or legalization of banned substances.

Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan does support the site.

At yesterday's ceremony, many of the dozens of supporters told stories of how **Insite** changed them.

On New Year's Day 2004, Darryl James overdosed at **Insite**. The 50-year-old heroin addict said workers saved his life. "If they shut **Insite** down, there will be a lot of people dying," said James, who called the site a "stepping stone."

He's now in the North American Opiate Medications Initiative program, a clinical trial testing whether heroin is more effective than methadone in helping chronic users.

"Soon, I'll be clean," James said. "I'm really working toward that and without a doubt, **Insite** helped."

Federal Health Minister Tony Clement was unavailable for comment.

### IMAGES



Jon Murray, The Province  
Heroin addict Darryl James stands amid the 336 crosses supporters of Vancouver's safe-injection site erected in Vanier Park yesterday to represent lives that could be lost if the site is not continued.

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His spokesman, Erik Waddell, said the government will not approve new sites or commit to an extension of the site's exemption until it completes an assessment of research results on supervised-injection sites.

**Insite** has an average of 600 visits a day. There has never been a death.

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Illustration:

• Photo: Jon Murray, The Province / Heroin addict Darryl James stands amid the 336 crosses supporters of Vancouver's **safe-injection site** erected in Vanier Park yesterday to represent lives that could be lost if the site is not continued.

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