

**Key players in safe sites: Project depends on police, health officials, politicians and one leader who opposes the idea**

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Darren Stone, Times Colonist  
Kits like these are being used at safe injection site in Vancouver. Will we be seeing them in Victoria?

**The Safe Injection Players:**

Victoria's mayor has promised that a safe injection site will become a reality in 2006.

But before Victoria can swing open the doors of its own facility -- becoming only the second city in North America to do so -- a number of key people must be on-side with their support.

Below is a description of who is involved, what their responsibilities are, and how they feel about safe injection, as collected in interviews with the Times Colonist in the past two months.

**VICTORIA MAYOR ALAN LOWE**

**Responsibility:** Mayor and council approve the injection site location, and apply as a city for a legal exemption on drug use, necessary to run the site, from the federal government.

**Position:** In favour. Ran for re-election on promises of harm reduction. Will file a site application to the federal government in 2006, he said.

**Quote:** "There is a time where you have to just go out there and say this is the right thing for the community, and just do it. I think that time will come probably sometime in [2006] where we will have the support of VIHA [Vancouver Island Health Authority] as well as support from the federal government."

"What you will find out here though is this: Everybody you talk to at this point will support harm reduction, and they may support a safe injection site. But try finding a location. That's where the difficulty will be."

**VICTORIA POLICE CHIEF PAUL BATTERSHILL**

Responsibility: Provincial and federal governments expect a local police endorsement of a safe injection site.

Position: In favour. Would prefer

it was located a block or two outside the downtown core. Additional police officers would not be needed to police the site or monitor its users, but Battershill would appoint a liaison officer.

Quote: "We are supportive of the idea and we think it makes sense."

VANCOUVER ISLAND HEALTH AUTHORITY CHIEF MEDICAL HEALTH OFFICER DR. RICHARD STANWICK

Responsibility: VIHA sets the budget and potentially pays the bills for a safe injection site. Vancouver's downtown east side safe injection site, Insite, is funded by VIHA's mainland counterpart, the Coastal Health Authority.

Position: In favour. Currently working on a business plan for safe injection. VIHA board members must decide the size, services, and medical facilities that accompany a site.

Quote: "The amount of support is really very impressive. But the devil is in the details. How are we going to bundle this with other services? Because the province doesn't want to see a stand-alone supervised consumption site, it has to be part of a larger strategy."

B.C. HEALTH MINISTER GEORGE ABBOTT

Responsibility: Province provides health care money to VIHA to run a safe injection site.

Position: Wants to see more research from the Vancouver site. The issue of available provincial money for VIHA to run a Victoria site is "if an issue at all, a very minor issue."

Quote: "If we see an application ... that has the clear unequivocal support of the municipality, of the city police, and of the regional health authority [VIHA], I certainly would give it serious consideration."

FEDERAL HEALTH MINISTER UJJAL DOSANJH

Responsibility: Health Canada, if run by a re-elected Liberal government, must grant Victoria's site a key exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The legal exemption allows drug use on the site, without the threat of police interference. Also, in the case of Insite in Vancouver, Health Canada provides federal money for research reports.

Position: In favour of a safe injection site in Victoria, and other cities.

Quote: "I believe if you have a significant drug problem, which I think Victoria has, harm reduction approaches would be helpful. And a safe injection site, if asked for by the local community and the province, I would certainly support."

CONSERVATIVE LEADER STEPHEN HARPER

Responsibility: Health Canada, if run by a Conservative government after the Jan. 23, 2006 federal election, would be asked to approve the same exemption from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

Position: Not in favour. Conservatives would not grant legal exemptions for cities such as Victoria, and could move to shut down Vancouver's two existing safe injection sites, Harper has said.

Quote: "We, as a government, will not use taxpayers' money to fund drug use."

Illustration:

- Photo: Darren Stone, Times Colonist / Kits like these are being used at safe injection site in Vancouver. Will we be seeing them in Victoria?

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