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Gay Bashing Forum Highlights Lack of Crime Reporting

June 3rd, 2010 at 9:56 am by Erin Rook · 5 Comments

A community forum held Wednesday, June 2, in response to an alleged [queer bashing over Memorial Day weekend](#) highlighted the lack of reporting of bias crimes against the queer community and the importance of action and accountability on the part of the community, Portland Police and local officials.

While the victims of Sunday's alleged assaults filed a police report, many crimes go unreported, a reality made starkly clear by the end of the forum.

Stephen Cassell, who organized the forum with *Just Out* columnist Daniel Borgen, asked the audience how many knew someone who had been queer bashed. Nearly every hand in the packed Q Center audience shot up. Yet, the statistics cited by law enforcement told a different story.

According to Portland Police Central Precinct Commander Mike Crebs, there were 15 reported bias crimes based on sexual orientation in 2009, and 8 so far in 2010. In response to questions about whether the city sees an increase in bias crimes during the Rose Festival, Crebs said there were no such crimes during June of 2009.



Airick Heater, Blow Pony party promoter and a survivor of multiple queer bashings, reacted to June statistic with shock until Crebs clarified that he was citing reported crimes. Last June, during Pride, multiples members of the queer community were [attacked outside of Casey's](#) during his Blow Pony party. However, none of the attacks were reported as bias crimes.

"We're told by police that this doesn't happen often in Portland," said one of the victims of the Memorial Day attack, identified as Birch (also known by the drag name Itsy Von Von Bon), but "if we as a community don't report these crimes, there are no statistics."

Birch spoke as part of a panel of victims of queer bashings, which included Heater and Jeffrey Darling, who was part of last weekend's incident.

The victim's panel was followed by a panel of

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government officials that included Mayor (and Police Commissioner) Sam Adams, Portland Police Chief Mike Reese, Assistant Chief of Police for Investigations Eric Hendricks, Multnomah County Chief Deputy District Attorney Rod Underhill, Oregon Department of Justice Chief Counsel Sean Riddell and Crebs.

All of the panelists emphasized the importance of reporting crimes, and expressed concern over the apparent disparity between the statistics and the experiences of community members, many of whom reported first- or second-hand encounters with bias crimes during the Q and A portion of the forum.

Cassell said that DJ Robb Nelson from CC Slaughters was "jumped" leaving work early Sunday morning. While Nelson was unable to attend the forum, he has posted on Facebook that he was the victim of an assault that weekend, though he says he remembers little of the incident. One audience member claimed that a friend had been attacked outside of the Southeast club Aalto over Memorial Day weekend as well, but didn't know the details or why his friend had not filed a police report.

"It's apparent to me that the number of crimes is at odds, apparently greatly at odds, with the number of reported crimes," Hendricks said.

The mayor said he was glad that the victims of last weekend's alleged attack chose to file a report and emphasized the importance of the safety of the queer community.

"I want to make it really clear that Portland is the kind of city that no matter who you are or how you dress you have a right to be safe and feel safe," Adams said.

But in order for people to feel safe, the panelists noted, they have to be comfortable filing a police report when that safety is violated. Underhill was struck by the existing lack of comfort around the issue, and related it to his experience working with survivors of domestic and sexual assault.

He said, based on statistics from the 1990s, a woman is abused seven times before she reports it to police. While there are many reasons for the delay, "one is the perception, or reality, that the right thing isn't going to happen. I think we need to take ownership of that."

Underhill acknowledged that there was work to be done in making members of the queer community more comfortable with filing police reports and promised to think about ways to change that.

"I don't want it to happen seven times to any of you before you report it," he said.



To report a crime in progress, call 911. To report a crime that is not an emergency, call the Portland Police non-emergency line at 503-823-3333.

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5 RESPONSES SO FAR ↓

1 Airick // Jun 3, 2010 at 2:02 pm

Worth mentioning is there was a report made in June 2009 the day after the attacks outside blowpony! A trans women attacked on the max line was declined making a report by officers who responded! this women walked herself into the Portland police department and filed a report! Why is that not showing on the "2009 statistics"?

2 Ryan // Jun 3, 2010 at 2:33 pm

The city needs to stop agreeing that we have the right to be safe and get off their bums and actually *do* something about it. We know we have the right to be safe, they talk about it. But what are they actually doing about it???

I don't believe that our gay mayor has a clue of our experiences. He hides behind his privilege of being a white straight-acting man of power. His police force does not respond aggressively to him or by making fun of him to his face when there is a problem. That is, however, the response that not only queers get from Portland Police, but unfortunately most minorities.

3 Jubal // Jun 3, 2010 at 6:16 pm

Cops are Cops.

they recieve a paycheck and do only what they HAVE to to continue drawing a paycheck. It is really up to us to police this situation.

4 Randy Blazak // Jun 4, 2010 at 10:04 am

I thought it was important for law enforcement and Mayor Adams to hear the community's frustrations, but I was most impressed by the survivors testimony. It really speaks to the emotional victimization that occurs with hate crimes. Please feel free to use the Coalition Against Hate Crimes as a resource.

5 Jay R. // Jun 4, 2010 at 1:36 pm

It's the responsibility of the police to act appropriately when someone files a report. It's the community's responsibility to file the reports in the first place.

If [you] don't file a report, it's not the police dept.'s fault that those statistics don't exist, and that the crimes go unsolved. It's because they don't even know it happened.

They're not omniscient – they only know what they're told.

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