

## Crack Pipe Push Sticks: Questions and Answers

### **Question: What is a push stick?**

Push sticks are used to pack and position the filter or screen (often Brillo) inside the crack pipe. Once the crack has been smoked the push stick is used to move the filter back and forth to partially recover the crack that has hardened on the inside wall of the pipe as the pipe cools.

### **Question: What are push sticks made of?**

- Metal- (e.g. coat hangers, broken off car aerials, small screwdriver); these may chip the glass inside the pipe and cause the ends of the pipe to break
- Wood (e.g. chop sticks or kebob sticks) or
- Plastic (ball point pens or the plunger from a syringe)

### **Question: Why is using syringe plungers a problem?**

- When the syringe plunger is used the rest of the syringe including the attached needle is discarded.
- The plunger is plastic and can melt inside the hot pipe.
- Syringes are relatively expensive and this wastes harm reduction resources that could be used elsewhere.

### **Question: How frequently are syringe plungers used as push sticks?**

- Service providers in Vancouver estimate 1 in 5 syringes distributed may be used for the plunger only.<sup>1</sup>
- In a survey of male crack users over 50% said they had used syringe plungers.<sup>2</sup>

### **Question: Why does the BC Harm Reduction\* Strategies and Services provide wooden push sticks?**

- To avoid discarded needles and potentially toxic melted plastic related to use of the syringe plunger
- Wooden craft sticks are cheaper than syringes
- The wooden push sticks are less likely than metal to crack the glass pipes and therefore may avoid cuts to fingers and lips
- Providing supplies for people who do not inject drugs creates a further point of engagement for otherwise hard-to-reach / under serviced populations.

### **Question: How can wooden push sticks be ordered?**

The push sticks can be ordered using the harm reduction supply requisition form available on line at <http://www.bccdc.ca/default.htm>, which is then faxed to BCCDC. The sticks come in packets of 100.



## References

\*For a definition of harm reduction please see Health file #102, Understanding Harm Reduction <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile102a.stm>

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication Sheena Campbell, Coordinator Harm reduction programs Vancouver Coastal Health.

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary results from Safer Crack-use Outreach Research and Evaluation survey.