

Ethan Donahue, Ella Durchin, Jonathan Suni

Eugene Handles Fentanyl Crisis Differently

EUGENE, Ore. - Portland and Deschutes County both declared a 90-day state of emergency in response to fentanyl usage, Eugene has no plans to change its current approach.

“We are not at this moment working toward declaring a state of emergency,” said Eugene Mayor Lucy Vinis.

Vinis wants to see how community services, such as the Incident Command Structure downtown, impact the metrics concerning Eugene drug usage. Vinis is prepared to take action if the metrics don’t improve, “This [drug usage] is a growing challenge and an emerging landscape.”

The ICS, due to a new county partnership, will also have a mental health professional on staff. When dealing with drug usage Eugene’s goal is to keep drugs off the street and provide support for those in need.

In 2018, the Eugene Police Department had 989 drug related arrests. By 2023 there was a 90% drop with only 96 such arrests made. In the first six weeks of 2024 there have been 20 drug related arrests.

The Street Crime Unit of the EPD deals with narcotics, usually methamphetamine or fentanyl, along with firearms. The unit focuses on getting local dealers, many being repeat offenders, out

of the community and into prison. Occasionally this unit will work alongside the Drug Enforcement Administration regarding drugs moving on I-5.

“I remember when meth became the new big thing,” said Blake, a member of Narcotics Anonymous. “But now fentanyl is moving through, and I don’t think the community is ready for that. I mean the deaths are stacking up and no one seems to notice, how long can that keep going?”

On Feb. 7, the street crimes unit apprehended a man with five ounces of fentanyl in his pocket. That amount has a market price of about \$5,000 and is “a lot of user fentanyl,” Sergeant Tim Hunt said. Users normally buy about a gram at a time.

“I think if folks had a real idea how much is out there and how much it’s affecting their community, I think they’d be pretty shocked,” said Hunt. “We’re seeing pounds and pounds of methamphetamine come through.”

Legislators are working toward “amendments to measure 110 [the Drug Addiction Treatment and Recovery Act] to potentially make it more effective in terms of getting folks into treatment,” said Vinnis. Until such amendments are made the Eugene community will rely on the previously instituted support systems.