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ZDNet / NSW Police Minister / Story

UPDATE: Drug sniffer-dog alert site strains under pressure

By Rachel Lebitan, ZDNet.com.au on May 23rd, 2002

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Costa seeks to shut down sniffer-dog alert site



The controversial site, that sends registered members of the public SMS messages to warn them where police are patrolling drug detection dogs, was swamped by so many people yesterday that outages were prevalent as the server struggled to cope with demand.

The site, operated by NSW Council for Civil Liberties and Redfern Legal Centre, was set up on Tuesday, May 21 and saw "hundreds of thousands" of people attempting to log on yesterday when the site was at its height of public awareness following an outcry from NSW Police Minister Michael Costa and his call for the site to be taken down.

According to NSW Council for Civil Liberties president Cameron Murphy, the site was flooded and went down for short periods immediately after it was aired on yesterday's television and radio news programs. "It's probably the hottest site in Australia at the moment," he told ZDNet Australia. "For short periods the server could not cope...it's quite clear it's nothing other than demand."

Following yesterday's call for the site to be taken down and the Police Minister seeking legal advice as to whether the site operators were committing an offence, Murphy said legal advice was sought from an eminent team of eight QCs and barristers before the site went live. "they tell us it complies with the law". The Police Minister has since acknowledged "it's unlikely we could pursue that on a legal front".

According to Murphy, the site was borne following drug sniffer dogs that wrongfully detected drugs on an IT programmer, who was then accused of being a drug dealer by police. "In talking to him we came up with this idea and he came up with the software," Murphy said.

Touting it as an "IT first", Murphy says this is the first time an "instant message" service like this has been put in place. The site, he explained, has a number of verified scouts in the field who warn of patrolling sniffer dogs by sending a code via SMS to the Web site server. The server verifies the scout and sends an SMS out to people registered in specific areas warning them of the detection dogs.

The service is able to send out 400 messages a second, according to Murphy who claims over 300 members of the public have signed up to be alerted to drug detection dogs since the site went live. Furthermore, the service has 60 verified scouts and about another 40 applicants who want to "register their service as civil rights activists," he said.

"The Web site enables us to keep track where sniffer dogs are being used and if they're being used in a discriminatory way," Murphy said. "If the police have got nothing to hide then they've got nothing to fear."

According to Murphy, it costs between AU\$50,000 and \$100,000 to train any one dog and keep it running, plus one handler is required per sniffer dog. "That's enough money to put three police officers on the beat who are infinitely better at detecting and solving crime than any dog will ever be."

Murphy pointed to the use of drug detection dogs in Sydney's Kings Cross last weekend 2600 people were stopped by dogs and searched by police, and only 33 people were picked up for having illicit drugs on their person.

Murphy said he would be happy to sit down with the Police Minister and talk things through. "I think there is room to come up with a solution," he said.

However, a spokesperson for the minister was adamant that the site would not "deter sniffer dog operations".

"The Council for Civil Liberties has eroded their credibility and destroyed their reputation by taking this stance," the minister's spokesperson said. "We ask that they respect the actions of front-line police and also respect the civil rights of law abiding members of the community."

Legislative Assembly Hansard - 23 October 2001

"The sniffer dog's function is to provide a preliminary alert to the need for the search. When the dog sits, that is an indicator to the operator of the need for a search. Searches for illicit drugs are made under section 37 of the Drug (Misuse and Trafficking) Act 1985, which allows police to stop and search for prohibited drugs when they reasonably suspect the person is in possession of them. Police use the dogs to provide them with that reasonable suspicion. If the dogs' actions indicate they have detected drugs then police consider they have reasonable suspicion to search. Last weekend's police raids reaped cocaine, ecstasy and marijuana. In previous busts, as they are referred to by the police, on **27 May, 17 June, 25 June and 29 July of this year** there were similar results. So it was not an isolated incident over the weekend; it has been building up."

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#docid/HANSARD-1323879322-25542/link/11>

DFA notes that the injecting room opened 6 May 2001

Table 4.2. Quasi-Experimental Evaluations of Supervised Consumption Sites

Study	Outcomes Measured	Period	Location	Analytical Method	Treatment Designation	Control Designation	SCS Association with Outcome
Freeman et al. (2005)	Incidence of drug-related property and violent crime	September 1999–October 2002	Sydney	Visual comparison across cases; time series analysis with a segmented regression approach within treatment case	Local area command where SCS is located—Kings Cross neighborhood	Rest of Sydney	No visual difference in reported crime trends in treatment and control areas; regression coefficient indicating operation of SCS not statistically significant with incidence of crime reported in treatment area
National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research (2007)	Fatal overdoses, overdose-initiated emergency service calls, and emergency department episodes for opioids	May 1998–April 2006	Sydney	Poisson regression to test significance between treatment and control cases	Postal zone where SCS is located in Kings Cross neighborhood	Rest of state of New South Wales	No significant difference in number of fatal overdoses between treatment and control areas; significant difference in decline of emergency service calls in designated treatment area relative to rest of state
Fitzgerald, Burgess, and Snowball (2010)	Criminal incident reports of robbery, theft, and drug-specific crime	January 1999–March 2010	Sydney	Visual comparison across cases; nonparametric hypothesis test (tau coefficient) to test within-case changes	Local area command where SCS is located—Kings Cross neighborhood	Rest of Sydney	No visual difference in reported theft and robbery incidents between treatment and control case areas; drug-specific crime stable in treatment area, up in rest of Sydney; significant reductions of robbery and crime within cases over time

Study	Outcomes Measured	Period	Location	Analytical Method	Treatment Designation	Control Designation	SCS Association with Outcome
Salmon et al. (2010)	Emergency service calls for opioid-related overdoses	May 1998–May 2006	Sydney	Poisson regression to test significance between treatment and control cases	Where SCS is located in Kings Cross neighborhood; postal zone where SCS is located	Rest of State of New South Wales	Significant difference in decline of emergency service calls in designated treatment area relative to rest of state
Marshall et al. (2011)	Fatal drug overdoses	January 2001–December 2005	Vancouver	Nonparametric hypothesis test (Wilcoxon test); nonlinear modeling of rate difference pre-post	500 meter radius around SCS	Blocks 500-meter radius outside SCS	Significant reductions in the number of overdoses within treatment area compared with rest of city; reductions in overdose rate in person-years exponentially declines farther from SCS
Donnelly and Mahoney (2013)	Criminal incident reports and rates of robbery, theft, and drug-specific crime	January 1999–December 2012	Sydney	Visual comparison across cases; nonparametric hypothesis test (tau coefficient) to test within-case changes	Local area command where SCS is located—Kings Cross neighborhood	Rest of Sydney	No visual difference in reported crime trends incidents between treatment and control case areas; significant reductions of crime within cases over time
Vecino et al. (2013)	Discarded injection material	2004–2012	Barcelona	Nonparametric hypothesis test (Mann-Whitney)	Two districts where SCSs opened	Rest of Barcelona	No significant change in number of improperly discarded syringes in treatment district; statistically significant reduction of discarded injection equipment across city
Espelt et al. (2017)	Discarded injection material	2004–2014	Barcelona	Interrupted time series, Poisson regression	Districts B and C where SCS opened	Nontreatment districts in city	Short-term increase in discarded syringes in treatment and control districts, then decrease and stabilization in number of improperly discarded syringes in public spaces across city
Myer and Bellisle (2018)	Reported incidence of violent and property crime	January 2002–December 2004	Vancouver	Time series analysis using autoregressive integrated moving average to compare changes over time within cases	Police District 1, where SCS is located	Police Districts 2–4	Significant reductions in reported property and violent crime in treatment district after SCS opening; no reported reductions in crime in control districts