California, Here I Cum

A crazy crop of porn-film fines, bathhouse crackdowns, and novelty STD e-cards erupt

January 1, 2005 By Jennifer Block

California officials are rubber-stamping the entire state, trying to get pornmakers, bathhouses and Web surfers to have safer sex. First, on September 15, its Occupational Safety and Health Administration fined adult-film companies Evasive Angles and TTB Productions an unprecedented $30,560 each for failing to protect actors from harmful bodily fluids. In March, Evasive Angles, straddling LA's San Fernando Valley porn hotbed, produced a shoot that infected three actresses (see "Risky Business," August 2004). Phillip Rivera, who owns both companies, is appealing, most likely arguing that he hires freelance actors and is exempt from standard employment regulations.

A few miles down the freeway, the LA County Health Department wants to parch the city's gay bathhouses. A June study found that HIV infections among LA's towel boys was twice that of gay men locally. The department wants to inspect bathhouses unannounced, close them if patrons are found barebacking and ban patrons who violate the rules. Gay-rights groups and club owners say civil liberties and attendance would go down the drain. "You don't get HIV from going to bathhouses," Scott Campbell, manager of two gay bathhouses and a sex club, told *POZ*. "You get HIV from unprotected sex."

Meanwhile, the San Francisco Department of Health, hoping to catch Internet-tryst STDs in an online web, has financed an e-card program. Now, exposed folks can share the bad news with former hookups without calling them. Visit inSPOT.org (inSPOT = Internet Notification Service for Partners or Tricks) and select one of six nonjudgmental messages, like "I got screwed and you might have, too" or "It's not what you brought to the party—it's what you left with." Then find your STD on the drop-down menu and share it with as many as six former tricks.

Why haven't projects like San Francisco's community-empowered e-initiative clicked elsewhere in the state? "LA provides prevention to 10 million people over 4,000 square miles," says Peter Kerndt, MD, STD guru at LA's Department of Health. "San Francisco has 49 square miles and a homogeneous community." But Kerndt's SF counterpart, Jeffrey Klausner, MD, says San Francisco has embraced community-driven programs since the beginning of the epidemic. "We've been working with city sex clubs since the mid-1990s. I think LA is just a decade behind."

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