www.safesexcity.com

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You'd think the Internet was invented to help a few horny people with very specific interests get their rocks off. If you're turned on by balloons (www.bustersworld.com), men with allergies (www.angelfire.com/pop/sneezingm4m) or obese ex-athletes (groups.yahoo.com/group/dumbjocksgrowingfat), there's a corner of the Web just for you. And barebackers are spoiled for choices.

How refreshing, then, to find a sexy new gay hookup site where safety is the fetish. At www.safesexcity.com, casual sex is valued as highly as monogamy, and condom use is the norm. Webmaster Frank Strona, a San Francisco AIDS educator, wants SafeSexCity to counter the online "illusion of anonymity" that he believes puts men in a vulnerable position when negotiating sex. Strona said his site is "a place for gay men to have sex that's really encouraging and develops gay men's wellness and health at the same time."

The site offers safe-sex info, and members are gently reminded twice a year that it's time for their STD checkup. Joining is free, but you'll need a paid membership ($11.95 a month) to send more than seven private messages a day. Strona hopes to use part of his proceeds to fund small grants to gay health initiatives defunded for promoting gay sex. "Everything the CDC says you can't do, that's what we want to see," Strona said. The site has a few wrinkles to iron out (not all browsers work), but it deserves to succeed.

Paul Kidd is an Australian journalist and a longtime survivor of both HIV and the early years of the Web. Visit him at www.buggery.org.

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