

The Washington Times

Portland's dark world of child sex trafficking

By [Michal Elseth](#) - The Washington Times

7:46 p.m., Wednesday, July 28, 2010

Portland, Ore., is widely featured as a young, green, hip city; it also has gained a reputation as a national hub for child sex trafficking.

[State police\(/topics/state-police/\)](#) report encountering three to five trafficking victims a week. Although the [Sexual Assault Resource Center\(/topics/sexual-assault-resource-center/\)](#), an advocacy group that offers services to Portland-area victims, estimates that it handled 75 cases in 2009, it also says that for every girl in its system 10 more are still being exploited.

"I just believe with my whole heart that people across the community would be appalled if they knew what was going on," said [Sgt. Mike Geiger\(/topics/mike-geiger/\)](#), who heads Portland's sexual assault detail.

Portland's legal commercial sex industry is the biggest per capita in the country, according to a report by researchers at [Willamette Law School\(/topics/willamette-university-college-of-law/\)](#)'s International Human Rights Clinic. Former [CBS News\(/topics/cbs-news/\)](#) anchor [Dan Rather\(/topics/dan-rather/\)](#) once called the city "Pornland." The city has more strip clubs per capita than glittery Las Vegas, and a tolerant attitude toward sex, both legal and illegal.

Combining those facts, a demand for sex workers, the city's geography that provides easy access for traffickers, and its reputation as a progressive youth-oriented community attracting runaways creates a toxic brew rivaling the notorious red-light district of Amsterdam.

"It's nonstop. It's every day," said [Sgt. Doug Justus\(/topics/doug-justus/\)](#) of the [Portland Police Department\(/topics/portland-police-bureau/\)](#)'s vice squad.

Victims of domestic minor sex trafficking have been picked up in every major city in the country and in many rural areas as well. Those "walking the track" on Portland's 82nd Avenue are often children exploited in their hometown.

[Linda Smith\(/topics/linda-smith/\)](#), president of [Shared Hope International\(/topics/shared-hope-international/\)](#), a Vancouver, Wash.-based advocacy group, calls Portland a "mecca" for underage trafficking. Of the domestic minors trafficked every year in the [U.S.\(/topics/united-states-of-america/\)](#) — the [FBI\(/topics/federal-bureau-of-investigation/\)](#) estimates 300,000, the majority being runaway or "throwaway" children — hundreds are being sexually exploited in a city of 600,000.

Recent [FBI\(/topics/federal-bureau-of-investigation/\)](#) stings gave Portland its much-disputed rating as second in the [U.S.\(/topics/united-states-of-america/\)](#) for domestic minor sex trafficking.

Of the 52 children rescued from 36 cities in the [FBI\(/topics/federal-bureau-of-investigation/\)](#)'s Operation Cross Country IV in October, four were from Portland. Portland participated in the sting for only one night; the stings in the other 35 cities lasted several days. Operation Cross Country III, in February 2009, rescued seven underage girls in Portland, out of 48 total minors rescued. The only city with more underage victims rescued in

either sting was Seattle.

[Story Continues →\(?page=2\)](#)

<< [previous 1\(?page=2\)](#) [3\(?page=3\)](#) [4\(?page=4\)](#) [next](#) >>(?page=2)

Ads by Google  [Child Safety](#) [Child Protection](#) [Child Safety Gates](#) [Child Safety Locks](#) [Child Safety Tips](#)