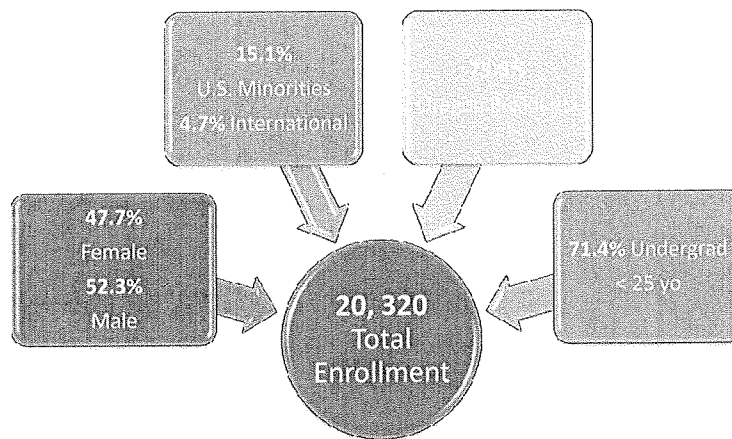


# Lethal Means Assessment Oregon State University

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## OSU (Fall 2008)



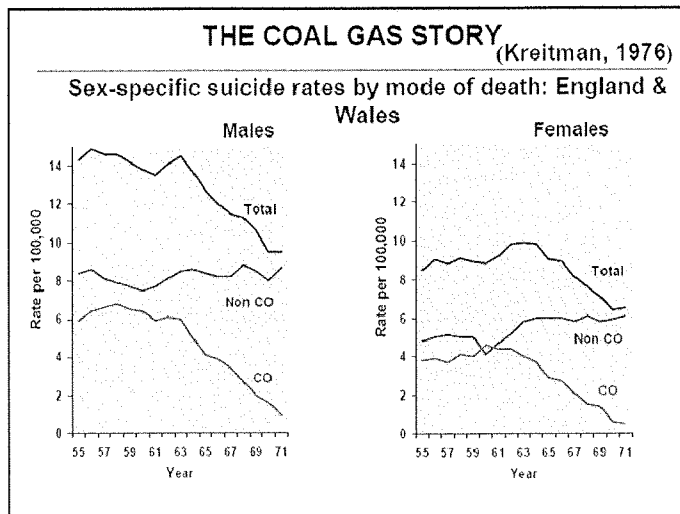
## Oregon/OSU & Suicide

- Oregon Death with Dignity Act
  - 1998: Garrett Lee Smith suicide, son of Oregon Senator Gordon Smith
- 
- 2005: Female sorority member died by hanging during spring break
  - 2006: Male fraternity member died by hanging in fraternity house
  - 2007
    - Tenured female faculty member dies by chemicals in a campus lab.
    - ROTC graduating senior and winner of cadet of the year dies from self-inflicted gunshot wound.

## Stages of Change: Precontemplation

1. Successful suicide requires a high level of motivation.
2. Given high motivation the acutely suicidal will switch means if preferred is unavailable.
3. There is effectively an unlimited number of means and therefore it is impossible to truly restrict access to means.
4. Means restriction is a fruitless effort

## Contemplation



## Contemplation → Preparation → Action

1. High motivation to **attempt** is relatively short-lived/impulsive in nature. Therefore increasing time interval between impulse and action can save lives.
2. Data suggests that many don't switch and by restricting access to most lethal means those that do switch have increased chance for rescue which data show translates into lives saved.
3. Four leading forms of fatal self-harm injuries account for 92% of all suicides in the 15-24 year age group (National Safety Council, 2008).
4. Means restriction is an effective suicide prevention strategy.

## The Means Assessment Workgroup (MAW)

### OSU

- 2 CAPS staff therapists
- Associate Director of Health Promotion
- Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology

### Ideal

- CAPS
- Campus Risk Manager
- Student Health Center
- Residence Life
- Campus Police
- Chemical Safety Committee member

**Keep in the loop and consult with:**

1. **General Counsel**
2. **Vice-Provost of Student Affairs**
3. **Your Director**

### Means Restriction (A working definition)

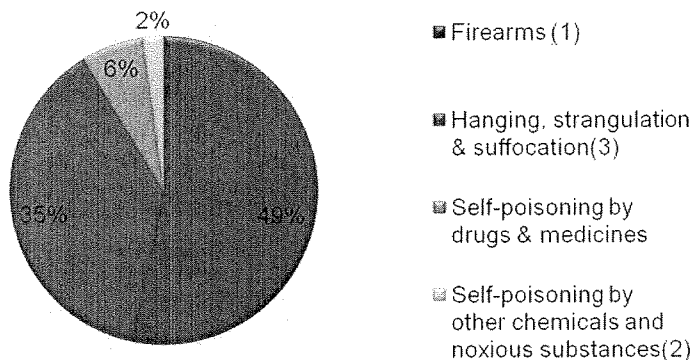
Proactive efforts by the community and/or the suicidal to accomplish the following:

1. Increase the time interval between the suicidal impulse and behavior.
2. Increase the effort required to act on an impulse.
3. Make highly lethal means less accessible than less lethal means. Thereby decreasing the effectiveness of suicidal behavior and increasing opportunity for rescue.

## Which Means to Focus On?

Means below account for 92% of total

### 15-24 Age Group



Mortality data compiled by the National Center for Health Statistics and analyzed by the National Safety Council

## Discretionary Immunity

- Described in *Haberman v WPPSS* (1987)
- Narrow court-created exception to the Legislature's abolition of sovereign immunity.
- Serves to assure that courts refuse to pass judgment on policy decisions in the province of coordinate branches of government.
- To be protected by such immunity, an act, omission, or decision must involve an exercise of basic policy evaluation, judgment and expertise by the governmental agency involved.
- The activity must involve basic policy discretion rather than the implementation of policy. Thus, only "high level discretionary acts exercised at a truly executive level" are protected.

<http://www.fraudlaw.org/Definitions%20and%20concepts/DEFINITIONS%20Discretionary%20Immunity.htm>

## Two Approaches Emerge

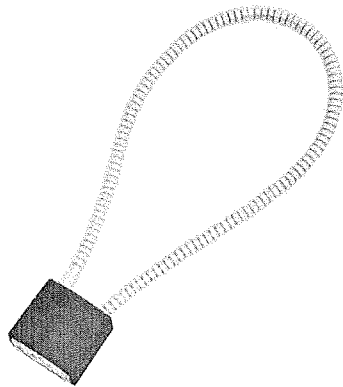
- Voluntary Means Restriction – The suicidal individual reduces their access to lethal means. This behavior is supported by community intervention to make this process more accessible.
- Universal Means Restriction – The community generally restricts access to lethal means.

## Firearms

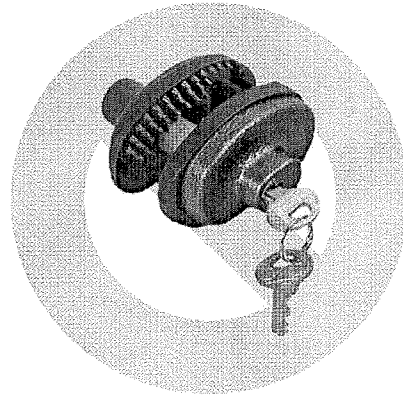
- Firearms are prohibited on the OSU campus.
- University-owned firearms available for student use are well-secured and use well-monitored.
- An estimated 4.3% or 649 OSU students possess a working firearm. (Miller; Hemenway; and Wechsler, 2002).
- Campus police & city police do not currently store firearms.

## Firearms-Voluntary Restriction

Action Lock



Trigger Lock



## Firearms – Voluntary Restriction

- Campus Police, General Counsel and CAPS discussing two options:
  - Police take possession of a student firearm permanently when requested by a student.
  - Police take possession of a student firearm and return it after a waiting period.

## Firearms – Future Directions

- Social marketing encouraging voluntary restriction?
- Waiting period for gun ownership?
- ???????

## Hanging, strangulation & suffocation

- Most vexing given wide availability of this means.
- Considering focus on tie points in private spaces- see "Safety Guide for Health Care Institutions" (Chaff, 1994)
  - Light fixtures should be recessed...
  - Shower rods, shower heads, towel racks, clothing racks, and other items strong enough to support body weight should be of the breakaway type or made of soft, bendable material such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC) piping. Shower heads should be recessed so that cords and pipes are not available for destructive use.
  - Rooms should not have drop or tile ceilings. Ceilings should be made of solid construction.
  - Air vents should be incapable of supporting body weight.



## Self-Poisoning By Drugs and Other Medicines

- Educate prescribers in the Student Health Service.
- Social Marketing
  - Proper Disposal
  - Rapid disposal generally of unused medication.

## Self-Poisoning by Other Chemicals and Noxious Substances

- Large and largely unexplored area.
- Cyanide as initial target of efforts?
- Future collaboration with Chemical Safety Committee.
- Homeland Security 1997 requirements might address some of our concerns.

## Lessons Learned Thus Far

- Means assessment and restriction is a relatively unfamiliar concept to most and provokes anxiety related to liability and restriction of personal freedoms.
- The National Plan for Suicide Prevention as well as the Oregon Plan and many other state plans list means restriction as a goal.
- Means assessment and restriction requires multidisciplinary collaboration on campus. It is best to begin this early.

## Future Directions At OSU

- Increase interdepartmental collaboration.
- Maintain working relationship with General Counsel.
- Maintain clear records of work done/progress made.
- Continue to engage creativity as we consider ways to reduce access while considering budgetary limitations and personal/professional freedoms.

Questions???