

Underage drinking laws reduce fatalities

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CALVERTON, Md., April 8 (UPI) -- Underage drinking laws reduce fatal accidents, saving an estimated 732 lives per year, U.S. researchers said.

James C. Fell of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation in Calverton, Md., said that the study further shows that if every state adopted "use and lose" laws -- suspending the license of anyone under 21 cited for possession, consumption or attempt to purchase alcohol -- an additional 165 lives would be saved.

The researchers analyzed data from 1982-2004, using the Alcohol Policy Information System; the Digests of State Alcohol-Highway Safety Related Legislation; the Westlaw database; and the Fatality Analysis Reporting System data set.

The researchers looked at six underage drinking laws and four general impaired-driving and traffic safety laws, and found the most significant impact came from four underage laws. For example, laws making it illegal to possess or purchase alcohol by anyone under the age of 21 had led to an 11 percent drop in alcohol-related traffic deaths among youth.

However, 3 of the 4 more general laws that target all drivers also were effective in reducing drinking driver crash deaths such as making it illegal to drive with more than .08 blood alcohol content; suspending a license for exceeding the .08 blood alcohol content while driving and enabling a police officer to pull over a driver who was not wearing a seat belt.

The study appears in the online version of the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.