



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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The OJJDP Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Initiative supports cooperation between community organizations, enforcement agencies, youth, and other concerned citizens to change local ordinances and enforcement practices.

In Kansas, Communities Lead the Way on Keg Registration

After many years, prevention advocates in Kansas have finally won passage of a statewide keg registration law. The Legislature passed the law only after several communities led the way by passing local keg registration ordinances.

Kansas, like many States, sees keg parties as a major venue for underage drinking. Often, police descend on a party to find that no one will admit to knowing where the keg was purchased. As one Sheriff put it, "It's like the keg fairy dropped them out of the sky." Advocates have proposed keg registration several times, but until recently the bills were consistently defeated. With such difficulty at the State level, advocates began looking for local solutions.

Frustrated by the defeats, the Chief of Police in Emporia, Kansas, asked whether it was possible to have a local ordinance in the absence of State law. Teresa Walters, of Emporians for Drug Awareness, decided to find out. She first spoke with the Director of the Kansas ABC, who told her that there was no preemptive language in State statutes. She also contacted MADD's national headquarters, and asked about strategies for getting keg registration passed. A local physician, Dr. James Barnett, called every state that had keg registration for information; officials in those states expressed wholehearted support for their keg registration laws.

The next step for Emporia was a postcard survey, which included a question about support for keg registration. More than 90% of respondents said that they supported such an ordinance! Armed with information from other States and the

results of their survey, Barnett and Walters took their proposal to the County Commission, where it passed in two meetings. Once Emporia implemented the ordinance, Walters visited several counties to explain the rationale behind keg registration. New ordinances soon followed in many of those counties.

By 2001, widespread support for keg registration led advocates to consider another attempt at statewide law. A leader in the Emporia effort, Dr. Barnett was now a State Senator, and as such he was able to introduce keg registration legislation once again. Unfortunately, the bill failed against strong alcohol industry opposition. Undeterred, Barnett met with liquor industry representatives and addressed their concerns. In particular, they were concerned with liability, which Barnett was able to address without gutting the bill. In fact, the requirements of the bill insulate retailers from some liability, providing them a strong incentive to support and comply with the law.

**>Our Point:
Communities, States, and law enforcement are successfully changing laws, regulations, and enforcement practices to reduce underage drinking.**

Finally, in 2002, Senator Barnett presented a revised version of keg registration. To support the bill, local youth descended on the State Capitol to conduct a "Message in a Bottle" campaign. Using old beer bottles, the youth affixed new labels with prevention messages, and included a fact sheet on underage drinking in the neck of the bottle. Every legislator received a bottle, and they had the opportunity to view a map of supporting communities across the State. In consequence, the bill passed handily and is now law in Kansas—proving that vigorous local advocacy can lead to statewide change.

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