



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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Massachusetts ABCC Investigators Are Back!

In March 2003, the Massachusetts Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission (ABCC) Investigative and Enforcement Unit was dismantled by Governor Mitt Romney, and 11 of the agency's 14 investigators were laid off. Between March 2003 and September 2003, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts saw an increase in underage drinking-and-driving tragedies according to many stories published in area newspapers. Alarmed by this rise, the State legislature moved control of the agency to the State Treasurer Timothy P. Cahill, who quickly rehired the investigators.

The investigators immediately launched several comprehensive enforcement operations across the State to heighten public awareness about their attention to underage drinking and impaired driving problem and to stem the spike in tragedies associated with these problems. The first Statewide operation, called "Safe Holidays," consisted of two enforcement components: Last Call and Cops in Shops.

"Last Call" is an enforcement operation that targets bars identified through source investigation as having been the last establishment to serve alcoholic beverages to a convicted drunk driver. It also targets establishments known to ABCC investigators as having a history of serving alcoholic beverages to intoxicated individuals. This operation focuses on preventing intoxicated individuals from getting on the road, as well as deterring bar owners from serving the potential drunk drivers.

The second component of Operation Safe Holidays, "Cops in Shops," targeted specific licensees who have a problem with underage individuals purchasing alcoholic beverages by using false identifications (IDs) or with adults procuring alcoholic beverages for underage individuals. During the course of this operation, investigators contact parents of the underage youth and inform them of their child's attempt to purchase alcohol either in the parking lot from an adult or with a false ID. Parents have been uniformly appreciative of the call that, under more tragic circumstances, might have come from an emergency room physician.

With the arrival of spring, the ABCC Investigative and Enforcement Unit recently launched "Operation Safe

Spring," which addresses the increase in underage drinking around the time of high school proms and graduations. The operation began May 13th, and so far, investigators have visited more than 30 cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth. As with the earlier operation, Safe Spring not only focuses on use of false IDs to purchase alcohol and third party provision, but also includes a focus on retail violations of the minimum purchase age laws.

Our Point:
Communities, institutions, and States are successfully changing laws, ordinances, and policies to reduce underage drinking.

Through both Operation Safe Holidays and Operation Safe Spring, the following results have been produced:

- Approximately 1,200 identification cards have been checked.
- 206 citations for minors in possession of alcoholic beverages have been issued.
- 59 adults have been cited for procuring alcohol for minors.
- More than 200 citations have been issued for violation of the liquor control act (primarily for sales to minors).
- 12 bars have been cited for serving an intoxicated person.
- 30 individuals have been placed into protective custody or provided with safe transportation home.

In addition to its enforcement activities, the ABCC also recently launched "TIPS on TAPS," a Statewide campaign notifying citizens how to report establishments that sell alcohol to minors or to intoxicated persons.

The ABCC has successfully re-established its presence in communities across the Commonwealth, reaping the appreciation of grateful parents and other adults. By no means, however, has it won the war on underage drinking. For that reason the State legislature directed the agency to obtain Federal funds to increase their enforcement efforts. The agency has done so and plans to further increase its scope of enforcement operations in the future.

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