



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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Montana's Multijurisdictional Approach Reveals Increase in Compliance Checks

In July of 2005, using funds awarded from the Montana Board of Crime Control, the Flathead County Sheriff's Office established a multijurisdictional Alcohol Enforcement Team (AET), comprised of the following agencies: Flathead County Sheriff's Office, Kalispell Police Department, Northwest Drug Task Force, Montana Highway Patrol, Columbia Falls Police Department, Whitefish Police Department and the U.S. Forest Service. The AET selected officers from each agency to participate in specific strategies that target alcohol accessibility and availability to persons younger than 21. The AET grew out of "STOP Underage Drinking in the Flathead," a subcommittee of the Flathead Prevention Alliance. It was later deemed the coalition.

The overall goal of the AET is to save the lives of youth in Flathead County by preventing underage drinking. Throughout the year, the team has been aggressive in conducting more than 200 compliance checks. Since its implementation, the overall compliance rate improved from 40 to 70%. This accomplishment did not result just from the efforts of the AET, but from the community's involvement and support as well. Members of the team have trained more than 200 people in "Responsible Alcohol Sales." This training teaches the bartenders and sales clerks about the importance of asking for identification, detecting false identification, and not overserving patrons.

AET members are and have been available for public-speaking events at schools, committee meetings, and other social functions. Members are also involved in Alcohol Premise Examinations, where officers conduct walk-throughs to randomly check a patron's ID. This program, which helps identify false IDs, has been well received by the bartenders and the owners. Personal contacts have also been made with the bar owners during their peek business hours to ensure they have the tools and resources available to support them in preventing underage drinking.

Among all the activities, Party Patrols have by far been the most successful program in locating and enforcing underage drinking laws. Since July 2005, more than 1,400 youths have been cited for Minor in Possession of Alcohol, and more than 100 adults have been charged with providing alcohol. A combination of adults and youths were additionally charged with Obstructing a Peace Officer, Resisting Arrest, and Possession of Dangerous Drugs and Firearms Violations.

The AET is also responsible for saving the lives of 14 youths who were found unresponsive at youth parties, after telephonic search warrants were issued. The youths were then transported to local area hospitals for alcohol poisoning.

The success of this program not only relies on the AET partnership, but also community members and retailers who support the AET goal of creating a safer and healthier community. The AET has set a trend towards changing the social norms and strongly emphasizing that underage drinking is not acceptable.

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The views expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the views of the Office of Juvenile Justice for Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) or the Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center (UDETC) and are solely of the author/source.



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