



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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Breaking New Ground in New Mexico

Despite considerable logistical challenges, Sandoval County, New Mexico has witnessed impressive changes in retail compliance with the State's minimum purchase age law.

Located in central New Mexico, Sandoval County is large and ethnically diverse. It covers 3,714 square miles and encompasses six incorporated municipalities, whole or major portions of seven Native American pueblos, a large portion of the Navajo reservation, and many small unincorporated communities.

The size and diversity of the county posed considerable challenges for underage drinking enforcement. Moreover, compliance check operations in early 2002 yielded dismal results. Of the 156 retail stores inspected, 124 were cited for selling to minors, which translates to a retail compliance rate of only 21 percent!

Funding from the Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws (EUDL) program allowed for the development of a broad-based coalition to implement a comprehensive strategy to reduce alcohol availability to youth and community tolerance of underage drinking. This coalition includes the Sandoval County Sheriff's Office, Rio Rancho Police Department, Bernalillo Police Department, the DWI and Substance Abuse Prevention program, the Maternal and Child Health program, and the public school system.

Key components of their plan included training and education for retailers who have been issued citations for noncompliance. A merchant recognition component celebrated retailers who were found compliant by issued press releases to local media outlets. Other public awareness efforts included strategic use of media to generate community interest and involvement.

Within the public school system, a media literacy course examining alcohol advertising was added to the public school curricula. Also within the school system, administrators developed and expanded policies and procedures that support the prevention of underage drinking.

Sandoval County engaged students from the public school system to assist with compliance check operations in 2003. This activity produced a retail compliance rate of 92 percent! The coalition expected to reduce the sale of alcohol products to minors in the county, but never anticipated such a dramatic reduction.

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

Shoulder tap operations were added to enforcement efforts in 2003. During these operations, a total of 278 persons were asked to purchase alcohol for minors. No one completed a purchase, resulting in the issuance of no citations. Organizers believe that this outcome is primarily attributable to greater awareness among Sandoval County residents about the harms and risks associated with underage drinking and with alcohol provision to underage youth.

New Mexico may have many challenges, but with innovative, committed, and motivated people working together to promote public health and safety, the Land of Enchantment is becoming a better place for youth and families.

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