



The Artful Dodger

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Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan

This publication, with a nod to Charles Dickens's "Oliver Twist" is designed to provide information on the problem of Underage Drinking.

The nickname, "Artful Dodger", is still commonly used to refer to someone who is good at avoiding responsibility or the consequences of his/her actions.

Did You Know?

Fifteen percent of students in grades 9-12 (ages 15-18) surveyed in 1995 reported driving after drinking during the month before being surveyed, and more than one-third reported riding with a driver who had been drinking

Combating Underage Drinking: A Team Approach

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Cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, prescription medications and inhalants are all a danger to our communities and especially to your youth. One drug that was not listed above and is often overlooked is alcohol. A history including lower drinking ages, inconsistent enforcement/prosecution and a societal acceptance of youth experimenting with alcohol has created a major issue that is difficult to control.

A Team Approach

In Calhoun County, we have taken a team approach to addressing the issue of

underage alcohol use. Together, the Calhoun County Sheriff's Department, the Battle Creek Area Substance Abuse Council, and the Calhoun County Prosecutor's Office worked to form the Underage Drinking Forum. The Underage Drinking Forum brings together many agencies including: Mothers Against Drunk Driving, other law enforcement agencies, Students Against Drunk Driving, and concerned parents to build a unified team to publicly address this issue.

Compliance Check— Key

A key component to addressing this issue is

alcohol compliance checks. Generally conducted on a quarterly basis, Calhoun County law enforcement agencies have worked with local students and their parents to conduct these checks. The checks are conducted at different times during the year and are focused in conjunction with events such as graduation, prom, spring break, or the holiday season, however, these are not the only times checks are conducted. Usually, checks are done without notice to the license holder; however, we have worked with the media and let it be known prior to some checks that we would be out sometime the next

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Why Enforce Underage Drinking Laws?

Those in education and criminal justice have seen the devastation that drinking can cause teenagers – the tragic aftermath of traffic crashes and other traumas such as assaults, rapes, and other crimes. If these personal experiences are not enough to indicate the seriousness of underage drinking, statistics also tell a

compelling story. While young drivers are under-represented in drunk driving arrests, they are over-represented in alcohol related traffic crashes. While it can be discouraging to recognize how severe the problem is, we should also recognize that communities have the power to reduce this problem. Consistent,

vigorous enforcement reinforces the message that adults and youth must be responsible for their actions and that violating the law is unacceptable. Enforcement also helps to validate the activities of prevention specialists and can help treatment specialists identify youth in need of help.

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What Can Communities Do To Enforce Underage Drinking?

Law enforcement agencies in Michigan receive grant funding each year to pay for overtime enforcement of underage drinking laws through programs such as SPOTLIGHT, LOOKOUT, and PARTY PATROLS. These programs emphasize education and prevention to discourage minors from consuming and attempting to consume alcohol. SPOTLIGHT has law enforcement officers and retailers working together to deter minors from purchasing (or adults to purchase for minors) alcohol. LOOKOUT has law enforcement officers working with festival organizers in their communities. PARTY PATROLS has officers responding to parties and working with schools to prevent alcohol parties from happening.

Combating Underage Drinking: A Team Approach

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month or prior to the end of the year etc... We have targeted both retail sales and bars/restaurants. The checks have been comprehensive in nature, meaning we try to target all the retail sales or bar/restaurant sales in the entire county in one compliance operation. This avoids the "sting buster" calls (an automated calling system that warns other license holders of the compliance operation) that quickly put an end to the operation. The results of these compliance checks are relayed to the local media and are generally published or televised to the community.

Merchant Survey

But the work does not end with the violators and non-violators listed in the media. The Forum does not want to "guilt" license holders into a change in behavior, but actually work with the violators to bring about change in their policies and procedures. To this end we have developed a merchant survey to

be answered by those who were cited for a violation. The survey contains 20-25 questions designed to obtain information regarding: nature of the ownership of the business (franchise/company owned verses family owned), training and length of stay of employees, associations the business may belong to, policies regarding sales to minors (i.e. have policies changed since the violation; will they sell if the purchaser is 21, but the person they are with is not), is there appropriate signage in the business, nature of sales on the premises (i.e. keg sales, single can/bottle sales etc...), does the business reward employees for detecting minors attempting to purchase alcohol, and how often does the business experience minors attempting to purchase alcohol. This questionnaire is completed by a member of the Forum that goes out to the establishment and meets with the owner or manager. Once the questionnaire is completed, input is sought from the business as to what training, materials or other assistance

the Forum or member organization of the Forum could provide that would prevent sales to minors in the future.

As law enforcement we have held the Forum to the fact that compliance checks, while a key component in addressing the issue of underage alcohol use, cannot be the only method used to address this issue. The reason for this is clear. The alcohol used by minors is not just obtained from retailers and restaurants/bars. A substantial portion of the alcohol used by minors is obtained from home. With this in mind the Forum has developed a community strategy to educate parents on this issue. A presence at school and community events, helps provide information to parents and community members regarding this issue.

For more information

For more information on the Calhoun County program, contact Prosecuting Attorney John Hallacy at 269-969-6980 or at jhallacy@calhouncountymi.gov.