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prevention
Tactics

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Tips for Others

- **DATA COLLECTION IS ESSENTIAL.** Walsh Jackson suggests that groups collect baseline data on party calls for service, adult attitudes and other measures that groups can track over time to identify outcomes.
- **MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS.** Walsh Jackson notes that strong relationships are needed—with law enforcement, prosecutors and judges functioning together in the process of creating and using policy tools. The “buy-in” of police chiefs is essential.
- **AVOID TARGETING TEENS.** Adult responsibility is the focus of these ordinances. “Don’t blame all parents,” said Walsh Jackson. “Remember, it only takes one bad one for a community to experience a tragedy related to underage drinking.”

Media Output That Counts!

Print: Advocates generated 20 print media pieces in the form of news stories, editorials and letters to the editor from January 1999 to April 2003.

Broadcast: Advocates generated a total of 30 broadcast appearances in television and radio multiple spots during March, April, August, September and December 2003.

Let’s Hear From You!

We welcome readers’ comments on topics presented.

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Tactics is published periodically by CARS under its Community Prevention Institute contract with DADP. The purpose of this publication is to help practitioners in the prevention field stay abreast of best practices emerging from current research and to provide practical tools and resources for implementing proven strategies.

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prevention *Tactics*

SOCIAL HOST ORDINANCES

An Approach to Prevent Underage Drinking

How do we prevent underage drinking?

Many in the prevention field agree that reducing youth access to alcohol is an essential strategy. Student surveys have consistently reported that youth obtain alcohol in two ways: at retail locations and in social settings.



A giant loophole however, remains in social access routes. In national surveys, 67 percent of students report that they drink at friends’ homes. A student survey in the eastern region of San Diego County showed that 30 percent of youth drink at home with their parents’ permission. These kinds of statistics have motivated prevention advocates to seek ways to close this loophole and establish more accountability for adults who furnish alcohol to minors.

The concept of accountability is reinforced by researchers, who find that imposing liability is a deterrent to heavy drinking and to drinking and driving (Stout, E. et al., Journal of Studies on Alcohol, May 2000).

For the past decade, prevention advocates have teamed up with enforcement agencies to encourage retailer responsibility and compliance with state law. The focus on illegal sales to minors was revitalized by the state’s “three strikes” law, which allows revocation of a liquor license after three violations for sales to minors. Training and education has focused on clerks, servers and other adults in retail settings to promote checking of identifications. These efforts have resulted in lower rates of sales to minors.

Social Host Ordinances Enacted Throughout San Diego County

Last year, San Diego County experienced a wave of social host ordinance activity, and their story is instructive to other communities. The momentum surfaced after several years of organizing on underage drinking issues, which included the development of a Law Enforcement Task Force, strategic media exposure and data collection.

“In 1998, I went to rural east county to do zero tolerance presentations,” said Patty Drieslein, prevention specialist with the North Inland Community Prevention Program. “I met with Friday Night Live students, and asked for volunteers to speak at assemblies. I was amazed at how many of these youth told me they drank at homes, often with parents’ permission.”

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Tactics (tak´ tiks) n. **1.** a plan for promoting a desired end. **2.** the art of the possible.

Years later, and after incidents in her own neighborhood, Drieslein jumped at the opportunity to help promote solutions. “Brian Maienschein had just been elected to represent my area on the San Diego City Council,” Drieslein. “I approached him at the Policy Panel Legislative Forum about the issue, and we had a meeting the next day.”

Drieslein began working as chair of the Social Availability Committee. The committee operates under the umbrella of the Underage Drinking Initiative, coordinated by the local Policy Panel. Drieslein and other committee members believed accountability should come in the form of both a cost recovery device related to home parties and personal accountability for adult hosts through a criminal misdemeanor and fine.

Detective Larry Darwent of the San Diego Police Department, chair of the Policy Panel’s Law Enforcement Task Force presented a sobering statistic: In 2001, 7,519 calls to home parties were made by his department alone. “We were ahead of the game in that our department already distinguished between regular ‘disturbing the peace’ calls and ‘party’ calls. So we had the numbers,” said Darwent. “Others could build on our experience and establish a code for parties where minors were present.”

Legal research revealed that California law exempts all social hosts from damages when their guests injure or kill a third party. In addition, ordinances related to minors either in possession or under the influence of alcohol all referred to public areas. A new ordinance would need to address these loopholes, and the committee decided to seek accountability for simply hosting a party during which any adult allows underage drinking to take place in their home.

“We looked at Santa Rosa’s ordinance and those of a few other cities to determine what language would be best for San Diego,” said Simon Silva, a deputy city attorney with the City of San Diego. “I used to be a reserve police officer in Isla Vista, so the concept made a lot of sense to me. We had received many citizen complaints about teen drinking in neighborhoods and even in our canyons and ravines.”



As the Social Availability Committee moved forward, several variations of the law were enacted in the 18 cities within San Diego County. “It took off so fast that we were developing model language at the same time the concept was passing all over the county,” said Judy Walsh Jackson, associate director of the Policy Panel.

Media advocacy was an integral part of the process (see box, page 4). The committee staged news events and submitted editorials to the local newspaper. The San Diego Union Tribune endorsed the ordinance in a staff editorial. Fifty media appearances were generated by advocates in the

ENFORCEMENT IS NOW THE FOCUS

The Law Enforcement Task Force is playing a major role in encouraging use of the social host ordinances. In San Diego, the momentum to enact social host ordinances complemented a law enforcement effort already under way to reduce problems in college areas. Focused enforcement, with a deterrent emphasis, has resulted in a significant reduction in home party calls for service around San Diego State University.

“Parties used to run off the sidewalk and into the streets around campus,” said Darwent. “Today, the parties are much smaller, and people stay in the house to avoid problems with our department.” Darwent estimated that 25 cases have been filed to date in the nearly one year since passage in the City of San Diego.

In the college area, many offenders have been sent to Community Courts, where they are judged by their peers instead of a judge. “These peers are actually a lot harder on them than a judge would be,” said Drieslein. “Offenders are out-of-pocket for the fine, and they have to pay for the privilege of volunteering for each community service hour. We’ve heard great stories about the dialogue in court and subsequent change for the offenders.”

In the North County, prevention groups are organizing a law enforcement forum on the topic to focus more attention on the new law. The Social Availability Committee is also working to amend some of the earliest ordinances to add model components and to complete the jigsaw puzzle by passing ordinances in the cities without them.

The San Diego County advocates understand that a lot of work remains to ensure that adults are aware of the law and that law enforcement use it. The region’s MADD office recently recognized the Social Availability Committee for the ordinance work. “We’ve made an impact—no doubt about it,” said Darwent.

form of television news, print media news and editorial page entries. After the law was passed, prevention advocates arranged an exclusive ride-along for a reporter to observe enforcement in action.

As of February 2004, the county and 13 of 18 cities had passed the ordinance; language is currently pending in three cities. The ordinances enacted across San Diego County have several variations. Among the key components, the ordinances:

- **Define adults as anyone over 21 years of age. This will include older siblings, older college students and other hosts.**
- **Hold adults responsible regardless of whether they are home during the party or not.**
- **Create a misdemeanor and fine. The model calls for a \$1,000 fine.**
- **Include cost recovery specifically for law enforcement services. (San Diego County’s version dedicates these fees to local law enforcement and prevention efforts.)**

The Social Availability Committee has drafted a model ordinance that is posted on the Policy Panel web site (www.alcoholpolicypanel.org).

In the summer of 2003, the Institute for Public Strategies commissioned a public opinion poll. Results from the survey of 750 adults were supportive:

- 91 percent agreed that it is wrong for an adult to provide alcohol to a minor.
- 54 percent thought a \$1,000 fine was severe enough; 30 percent thought it was not severe enough.
- Only a quarter of San Diego adults were aware of the social host ordinance.

More information on survey results is available at www.publicstrategies.org.