

Do Social Host Ordinances Reduce Teen Parties?

Yes. As a result of enforcement, San Diego Police Department saw a reduction in home party calls around San Diego State University when their ordinance went into effect, according to Detective Larry Darwent (CARS, 2004). The proposed Petaluma Ordinance is designed as a prevention tool to stop parties where binge drinking is occurring by creating adult accountability without necessarily elevating the offense to the misdemeanor level which can carry a penalty of jail time.

The Ordinance proposed by the *Coalition to Prevent Underage and High-Risk Drinking* reflects current research

recommendations from the Institute of Medicine (IOM), and National Research Council. In the report of the IOM recommends a greater emphasis on restricting access by strengthening laws and ordinances that restrict youth ac-

cess to alcohol in home parties through education and enforcement (National Academy of Sciences, 2004). A stronger ordinance for the Petaluma community is a sound strategy based on current national trends.

Why Should I Support Policy Change?

Environmental prevention strategies focus on use of public policy to change the physical, social, and political context in which problem behaviors occur. Whether or how much adults and young people drink is shaped by community norms and expectations, as well as the access and availability of alcohol.

Similar to the demonstrated success of reducing smoking by limit-

ing availability of tobacco and smoking in public places, the research on alcohol is clear: shifting norms and reducing access to alcohol impacts the rates of high-risk drinking in addition to related problems among youth and adults.

The Social Host Ordinance is a powerful policy approach that our community can embrace to reduce underage binge drinking and related problems.

What Resources Exist for My Involvement?

Sonoma County's Department of Health Services has a three-year grant to create the Sonoma County Community Partnership (SCCP).

Key stakeholders in Cotati, Petaluma, Rohnert Park and Sonoma State University are working together to prevent and reduce problems related to high-risk drinking among youth and young adults. Partnership members include neighborhood residents, local law enforcement, city planning departments, school districts, nonprofits, and other public and private organizations.

The Partnership is receiving technical assistance from the Center for Community Action and Training (CCAT), a leader in the field of environmental prevention strategies and public policy interventions. CCAT has assisted communities across the country to pass public policies designed to reduce alcohol-related problems.

The Healthy Community Consortium, a local non-profit organization, provides technical assistance to two coalitions which have formed in South County to ensure that all groups are working to reduce community problems associated with binge drinking.

As a resident, nonprofit or community group, you can take action:

1. Write a letter of support and/or contacting your City Council member to express support for the Social host Ordinance;
2. Come to a Coalition meeting and get involved; and
3. Contact the HCC with your interest.



Contact us

Phone:
707-778-4951

Fax:
707-778-4953

E-mail:
Pat@HealthyCommunity. Info

Web:
WWW.HealthyCommunity.Info

Editor: Annette Padilla MPH & Michael Sparks, MA

Author: Pat Landrum

Layout: Pam Granger

An Issue Briefing

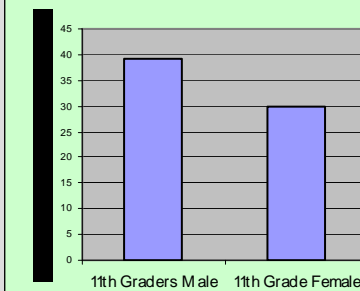
The Petaluma Social Host Ordinance A Tool for Reducing Underage Drinking at Home Parties

Petaluma Coalition
to Prevent Underage
& High-Risk Drinking

Summer, 2006
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This briefing offers an update on some strategies for addressing both large and small teen parties where alcohol is being served.

Petaluma Teens Binge Drinking

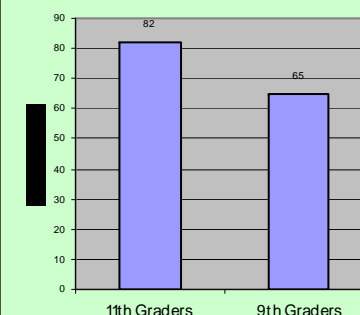


"The heavy drinking being reported by our teens may be one of the greatest dangers facing our youth. We are working together on ways to assist adults in becoming part of the solution to this problem as opposed to part of the problem."

Daymon Doss

CEO, Petaluma Health Care District

Petaluma Teens Reporting Alcohol "Fairly Easy" or "Very Easy" to Obtain Alcohol



What's the Problem?

New survey results show local teen drinking rates are higher than the average in California. According to the Petaluma Coalition to Prevent Underage and High-Risk Drinking, local teens are engaging in high-risk drinking more than other youth in the State.

Results of the 2005 California Healthy Kids Survey show 39% of male and 30% of female 11th grade students in Petaluma report binge drinking, defined as five or more drinks in two hours, (see left).

Ninth graders report binge drinking rates of 17% for males

and 20% for females (Coalition to Reduce Youth and High-Risk Drinking Press Release of May, 2006).

Reports of alcohol poisonings, traffic crashes, property damage, community disturbances, violence and sexual assault are too common as a result of underage drinking.



Average age of first full glass of alcohol—12 1/2 yrs.

Binge Drinking and Related Problems

The research on binge drinking and youth access is supported by recent reports of parents providing alcohol at end-of-the year parties (Petaluma Data Findings, 2005). Such parties can be particularly problematic because of the number of drinkers involved and the significant amount of alcohol individuals consume when binge drinking.

Teens experience a wide range of problems when they are involved with alcohol and binge drinking. Violence, including sexual assaults and fights, accidents, alcohol poisoning,

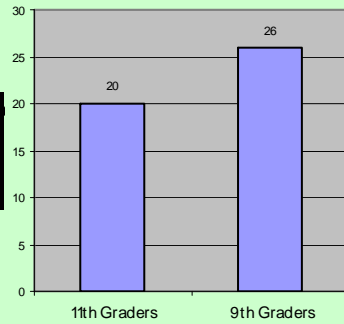
increased likelihood of alcohol addiction associated with significant changes in brain chemistry and lowered school performance are a few of the issues directly connected to teen alcohol use.

In addition, youth who drink before they turn age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol addiction than those who start drinking at 21, according to the National Institute of Health.

Parents providing alcohol to teens at house parties in order to keep them from driving is inappropriate and dangerous and only trades one problem for ten others that are equally serious.
Robin Harrigan - Petaluma Parent

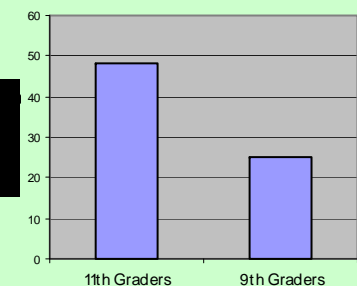
Do Adults Have a Role?

Petaluma Teens Reporting "Parent or Other Adult Present When Drinking at Parties"



According to City Police Chief Steve Hood, "These numbers should be of concern to all Petaluma residents. It should not be acceptable for adults to provide alcohol to teens at parties. Giving alcohol to minors is not only a violation of California law, but also leads teenagers into many other compromising situations."

Petaluma Teens Reporting That They "Get Adults to Buy Alcohol for Them"



Many Petaluma adults dismiss underage drinking as a "rite of passage". This tolerance stems from two misconceptions:

- 1) Alcohol is a relatively harmless substance compared to illegal drugs, in addition to drinking as an inevitable activity for teens; it's consumption is part of the transition to adulthood; and
- 2) Permitting consumption of alcoholic beverages in a residential setting is safer because impaired driving can be limited and some form of parental oversight is available in case of an emergency.

Access to Alcohol at House Parties

According to 82% of Petaluma 11th graders surveyed in 2005, it is very easy to obtain alcohol (*California Healthy Kids Survey, 2006*).

Easy youth access is supported by anecdotal reports from young persons in 2005 who reported they often got alcohol at home or at the residence of friends and that "house parties" were very common.

House parties are large gatherings of young people in a home

or on a residential property. In some cases, adults are home and may not be aware that the party is occurring or in many instances parties are happening at homes where parents are away. However, youth increasingly report that parents *are* home and allow drinking to take place sometimes actually purchasing the alcohol for the teen party.

A third scenario occurs where the host may be a young adult who is legally able to buy booze.

What Has Been Done To Address House Parties?

The City of Petaluma implemented a Teen Party Ordinance in 1995 in response to the concerns of youth drinking and adult complicity.

This law has had some impact. However, because of the continued seriousness of the issue and promising research about nuisance abatement strategies, our commu-

nity is considering the implementation of a Social Host Ordinance.



Tell Me about the Proposed Social Host Ordinance

Social host accountability refers to laws that hold non-commercial individuals responsible for underage drinking on property they own, lease or control. Legal research reveals that California law exempts all social hosts from damages when their guests injure or kill a third party (*Center for Applied Research Solutions or CARS, 2004*). Many communities utilize social host ordinances to close such loopholes. The Petaluma social host ordinance:

- Recognizes that loud parties on private property where alcoholic beverages are served to, or consumed by, underage persons is harmful, a threat to public health, safety, quiet enjoyment of the residential property, general welfare, and constitutes a public nuisance;
- Acknowledges persons responsible for the occurrence of unruly parties on private property over which they have control have a duty to ensure that alcoholic beverages are not served to, or consumed by, underage persons;
- Finds that landlords have a duty to prevent unruly parties, including those where alcoholic beverages are served to, or consumed by, underage persons,

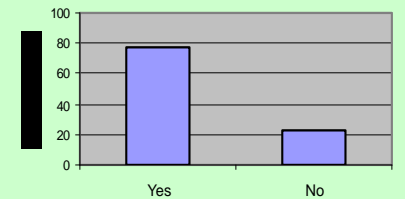
on private property they lease to tenants, even if they do not have day-to-day, physical control. With a first violation, only the tenant would be cited and the landlord notified of the incident. For second and third violations, it is up to the police whether to cite the tenant alone or both the tenant and landlord. The police work with landlords who are addressing problems caused by tenants and take this into consideration when deciding whether to issue a citation;

- Acknowledges that law enforcement, fire, or other emergency services often need to respond multiple times to disperse underage drinking parties, resulting in a disproportionate expenditure of public safety resources, delaying police responses to regular and emergency situations, and reducing police services to the rest of a community; and

- Recognizes that cities and counties require a variety of enforcement strategies to abate underage drinking parties under varying circumstances and that present policy constrains the ability of law enforcement to deter underage drinking parties and other gatherings.

Petaluma Residents Favoring Law Holding Adults Accountable for Nuisance-Related Problems Occurring at Teen Parties Where Alcohol Minors is Consumed by Minors

(Source: *Argus Courier* 5/24/06)



Petaluma Police Department had 5,398 calls for service involving alcohol during 2003-2005 (*Petaluma Data Findings, 2005*)

A Nuisance Abatement Strategy

The Petaluma Social Host Ordinance, as proposed, is designed as a nuisance abatement strategy that supports law enforcement officials who routinely respond to complaints from the public about unruly parties. It establishes that loud or uncontrolled parties are a "public nuisance".

It holds that the "responsible person" is an individual with a right of

possession on the property.

As a strategy for deterring underage drinking parties on private property, the social host ordinance imposes a criminal infraction on the responsible individual when an unruly party or public nuisance is found to exist.

Penalties for criminal infractions generally result in the issuance of a ticket at the scene, serving as a

swift sanction for violation of the ordinance.

In addition, imposition of a civil fine may also occur for the recovery of costs associated with providing law enforcement, fire, or other emergency services on multiple occasions to the scene of an unruly party where alcoholic beverages are served to, or consumed by, underage persons.