



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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## **WILL YOUR CHILD MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE? *Teens and Parents Reveal Ways to Keep Youth Away from Booze***

In an effort to curb underage drinking and avoid potential tragedies, County of San Diego officials are urging parents to monitor their children's activities during prom and graduation season, when underage drinking tends to increase.



**Jean Shepard, Vice-Chairwoman Jacob and Chairman Cox listen as Christina Litz discusses the reasons she does not drink.**

"This is a problem that can be prevented. We must do everything we can to keep our teens safe and healthy," said Greg Cox, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors.

Cox was joined by Vice-Chairwoman Dianne Jacob and Jean Shepard, Director of the County's Health and Human Services Agency, as well as several teens and parents.

They gathered outside the County Administration Center to talk about how some teens are able to resist the pressure to drink by making the "right choices".

County leaders also announced the number of young people in the past two years who had alcohol in their systems at the time of their death. Last year, 31 San Diegans under the age of 21 had alcohol in their systems when they died. In 2006, there were 29 alcohol-related deaths. These figures only include the young people who died under special circumstances and required an autopsy. Their ages ranged from 15 - 20 years of age and alcohol levels varied from .02 to .44.

"Underage drinking is not a rite of passage. It's important for parents to stay involved in their children's lives and communicate openly about the dangers of alcohol," said Vice-Chairwoman Jacob. "It's important to let our children be who they want to be but always know where they are and what they're doing."

While alcohol continues to be the drug of choice for people under 21, the reality is that the majority of young people do not drink. Of the more than 40 million people between 10 and 20 years of age, 69 percent choose not to drink.

“Teens hear about alcohol on the radio. They see it on television, in magazines and on the internet. They see it at home. Young people are bombarded by images that promote alcohol,” said Jean Shepard. “However, the majority of minors do not drink. They should be applauded for making the right choice.”

How are some teens able to say “no” to alcohol in a world that constantly screams “yes”?

“I choose not to drink because my parents would be disappointed,” said Christina Litz, a senior at Torrey Pines High School, who has been dancing since she was a little girl and volunteers for a youth group in North County that works to prevent teens from drinking. “I prefer to spend my time dancing and volunteering.”



**Demi Climax speaks about the activities that have helped her stay alcohol-free.**

It is against the law for young people to drink, yet more than 13 million of the nation’s 113 million drinkers are underage.

Statistics show that one-third of 6th and 9th graders get alcohol from their own homes. Minors also get alcohol from older friends and siblings, from the internet, from adults who are willing to buy it for them, and by using fake identification to purchase booze in the store.

Sixteen cities and all unincorporated areas within the County of San Diego are addressing the problem with “social host” ordinances, making it illegal to host underage drinking parties. Providing alcohol to minors at parties, gatherings or events on private property is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of \$1,000, six months in jail or both.

People with alcohol or drug addictions can access help by calling the County of San Diego Access and Crisis Line at (800) 479-3339.

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