



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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WHERE DO MINORS GET ALCOHOL? COUNTY OFFICIALS REVEAL SOURCES OF BOOZE; *Warn of Dangers of Underage Drinking During Graduations and Summer; Alcohol Present in 59 Young Deaths in San Diego County*

On March 30, 2000, a 15 year-old was drinking beer and vodka in a vacant lot. He then tried to cross the trolley tracks walking between two cars. He never made it across. On April 1, 2007, a 19 year-old college student and track athlete was drinking heavily with his friends. He passed out. He never woke up. Just two weeks ago, four high school students were on a graduation trip. They were drinking and driving. They crashed. They will never get to graduate. This week, the County Medical Examiner confirmed the cause of death of the 19 year-old female who died early last month. The SDSU student died of acute cocaine and alcohol intoxication.

The circumstances behind these deaths were all different but they had two things in common: The victims were under 21 and had been drinking before they died. They were not old enough to legally drink, yet they were able to get alcohol. Where did they get it? Who gave it to them?

"Minors are not allowed to buy alcohol, period. Whenever minors drink, one question must be asked: 'Who provided the alcohol?'" said County of San Diego Supervisor Dianne Jacob, a member of the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) Advisory Board, during a news event highlighting the dangers of underage drinking and warning adults about the consequences of providing alcohol to minors.

"If adults acted responsibly, alcohol-related deaths of minors could be prevented. Families and communities should not have to suffer the devastating consequences," added Jacob, who was joined by San Diego County Undersheriff Bill Gore; Susan Bower, Interim Deputy Director, County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's Alcohol and Drug Services; and Beth Sise, Chair of the San Diego County Alcohol Policy Panel.

The warning came at the heels of the latest alcohol-related tragedy and in anticipation of graduation celebrations and summer, when consumption of alcohol by minors tends to increase.

"We're reminding adults that it is dangerous to provide alcohol to a minor," said Bower. "Underage drinking is not a rite of passage. Giving alcohol to a minor can lead to criminal penalties or, worse, the loss of a loved one."

Alcohol continues to be the number one drug of choice among teenagers and it's taking its toll. In the last two years, 59 people under 21 had alcohol in their system at the time of death, according to the County of San Diego Medical Examiner's Office. That number only includes the young people who died under special circumstances and required an autopsy. Therefore, the actual number of people under 21 who had been drinking

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prior to their death can be higher.

Alcohol-related crashes are the leading cause of death among youth ages 15 to 20. Underage drinking also leads to increased rates of suicide, sexual assaults, and high-risk sex.

According to data from the 2005 Monitoring the Future study, an annual survey of U.S. youth, three-fourths of 12th graders, more than two-thirds of 10th graders, and about two in every five 8th graders have consumed alcohol. 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 and many teens cite other people's homes as the most common setting for youth consumption of alcohol. Minors also get alcohol from older friends and siblings, from the internet, from adults who are willing to buy it for them, and using fake IDs.

To help alleviate the problem of underage drinking, 16 incorporated municipalities and all unincorporated areas of the County of San Diego have adopted "social host" ordinances, making it illegal to host underage drinking parties. Any person who sells or provides an alcoholic beverage to a minor can receive a fine up to \$1,000 and up to 32 hours of community service.

"This time of year, in fact, this week, has been historically tragic for underage drinkers because of graduations and the beginning of summer for high school and college students," said Gore. "We will be extra vigilant in enforcement during this time, to help avoid the tragedies that affect families and friends alike," added Gore.

The San Diego County Alcohol Policy Panel has lead efforts to reduce and prevent underage drinking and was instrumental in getting the "social host" ordinances approved.

"Underage drinking parties are high risk settings for youth alcohol problems, including alcohol-related traffic crashes, sexual assaults, and other violence. Adults facilitate these problems when they irresponsibly allow minors to drink at their homes or other private settings," said Sise. "The Alcohol Policy Panel has worked hard to support local municipalities to enact social host laws that clearly define this behavior as illegal and impose fines aimed at deterring it."

John and Sue Tryon know first hand the tragic consequences that alcohol can have on families. In May 2003, their 18 year-old son Eric accepted a ride from Ryan Nielsen to go get something to eat. Eric did not know Nielsen had been drinking heavily. Nielsen, who was 21, lost control of his car. Nielsen and Eric both died.

"It was the most horrible night any parent could have," said Sue Tryon, who wants parents to pay attention to what their children are doing and to not provide alcohol to minors. "It is very painful and sad to go about your life without Eric. Alcohol kills. It destroys families."

Help is available for people with an alcohol problem or a drug addiction by calling the County of San Diego Access and Crisis Line at (800) 479-3339.

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