

SURVEY OF THE STATES

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**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
GOVERNORS' HIGHWAY
SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES**



U N D E R A G E D R I N K I N G P R E V E N T I O N

Introduction to NAGHSR'S Survey of the States: Underage Drinking Prevention

Background

Nearly every day newspapers and television news programs in cities and towns across America feature a story on the dangerous consequences of underage drinking – an alcohol-related motor vehicle crash, an alcohol overdose, a fall or other injury.

In the mid-1980s, the focus on underage drinking centered mainly on teen drinking and driving. Pressure to lower the legal drinking age during the Vietnam War (i.e., if you were young enough to die for your country, you were old enough to drink) led to different legal drinking ages among the states. In some, the legal drinking age remained 21, but in others, it was lowered to 18 or 19 years old. Often this created a serious traffic safety problem when young people traveled from one state where the drinking age was 21 to a neighboring state where the drinking age was lower.

In 1984, high-profile alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes, injuries and deaths resulted in the passage of the National Minimum Drinking Age Act, which strongly encouraged states to pass laws prohibiting the purchase and public possession of alcoholic beverages by anyone under the age of 21 by withholding a portion of federal-aid highway funds from states without such laws. By 1988, all states and the District of Columbia had enacted a minimum drinking age of 21. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates

that age-21 laws have saved 20,043 lives (of all ages) since 1975. In 2000 alone, these laws have saved an estimated 922 lives.

In addition to establishing a uniform legal drinking age across the country, all states have now adopted zero tolerance laws, which establish a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .02 or lower for drivers under age 21. Underage youth who violate these zero tolerance laws can face license suspension.

The effect of these laws on youth drinking and driving has been dramatic. According to NHTSA's 1999 Youth Fatal Crash and Alcohol Facts, the nation experienced the greatest historical decline in youth alcohol-related fatalities, in terms of both numbers and rates, during the six years prior to 1993, when the youth population was declining. Since 1993, despite a population increase of over 2.5 million, progress continues to be made. There were 119 fewer fatalities in 1999 than in the previous six years, and a continuing decline in the fatality rate. The fatality rate in 1999 was the lowest ever recorded, at nine fatalities per 100,000 youth. This does not mean the battle against drinking and driving by underage youth has been won. According to NHTSA, in 1999, there were 2,238 alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities involving underage youth, 19 more than in 1998. The biggest risk facing teens continues to be motor vehicle crashes.

INTRODUCTION

Improvement in the area of youth drinking and driving did not, however, translate into corresponding reductions in underage drinking in general.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse's 2000 Monitoring the Future Study, 22 percent of eighth grade students, 41 percent of 10th grade students, and 50 percent of all high school students reported drinking in the past month.

Alcohol use by young people, especially binge drinking (having more than five drinks at one time), continues to remain unacceptably high.

Over 30 percent of high school seniors reported binge drinking.

Self-reported monthly alcohol use increased for high school seniors from 48.6 percent in 1993 to 50.8 percent in 1996.

According to the Monitoring the Future survey, nine million youth, ages 12-20, reported using alcohol and of these, 4.4 million were "binge" drinkers and 1.9 million were "heavy" drinkers.

The percentage of youths reporting great risk in having five or more drinks once or twice a week decreased from 58 percent in 1992 to 45 percent in 1996.

Nearly half of all college students binge drink. On a national scale, this translates to about three million students.

On campuses where binge drinking is rampant (where more than 70 percent of the student body binge drinks), the vast majority of students (87 percent) have experienced one or more problems as a result of their peers binge drinking. These problems include physical assault, sexual harassment, and impaired sleep and study time.

Further, a 1992 Inspector General Survey on the dangerous and deadly consequences of youth use of alcohol found the following:

Nearly 32 percent of youth under 18 in long-term, state-operated juvenile institutions were under the influence of alcohol at the time of their offense.

Fifty percent of college students who said they had been victims of crime admitted they had used drugs or alcohol before the crime occurred.



Forty to 50 percent of young males who drowned used alcohol prior to drowning, and youth who abuse alcohol are less likely to use protection during sex thereby increasing their chances of exposure to the AIDS virus or pregnancy.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, children who begin drinking before the age of 15 have a four times greater chance of becoming an alcoholic as an adult than those who begin at 21, the legal drinking age.

Additionally, a NHTSA funded study, released in October 2000, found that people

who begin using alcohol before age 21 are more likely to be drivers in alcohol-related crashes later in life. For instance, a person who begins drinking at age 16 or 17 is four or five times more likely to be involved in an alcohol-related crash as an adult. (Age of Drinking Onset, Driving After Drinking, and Involvement in Alcohol-Related Motor Vehicle Crashes, NHTSA.)

Agencies within the federal government began to take note of the serious problem of underage drinking in the early 1990s. NHTSA funded a three-year pilot study conducted in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area that tested a comprehensive approach to the issue. The Center for Substance

Abuse Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also provided funding to 20 small to medium sized communities under their Teen Prevention Project, and three years ago, Congress appropriated money to the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) for an Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws program in all 50 states. The media also began to focus more heavily on the serious consequences of underage drinking, which helped to raise public awareness of the problem.

NAGHSR Underage Drinking Prevention Project

In March 1995, NAGHSR launched a pilot project on underage drinking funded by NHTSA. The pilot provided technical assistance to five communities in developing and implementing comprehensive underage drinking prevention programs. It was based on a model initiated in the Washington, D.C. area in 1992 at the direction of the U.S. Congress.

To build on the success of the pilot project, NAGHSR and NHTSA decided in March 1998 to pilot test another approach to providing technical assistance to communities working to prevent underage drinking. The revised concept involved intense, short-term assistance to communities provided by a team of nationally recognized experts. The “on-site” intensive technical assistance was christened the “Rapid Response Team” and gave each site a “jump start” in developing or strengthening comprehensive, needs-based underage drinking prevention programs.

As a result of their commitment to underage drinking issues and to assist cities, counties, and neighborhoods, NAGHSR, with financial assistance from NHTSA, developed a series of “Community How To Guides,” which address fundamental components of planning and implementing a comprehensive underage drinking prevention program.

These components include coalition building, needs assessment, prevention/education, enforcement, public policy, media and self-sufficiency. In addition, a case study on one of the original pilot projects which implemented the comprehensive strategy is included in the “how to” series.

For the final phase of the NAGHSR Underage Drinking Prevention Project, states will have an opportunity to develop their own rapid response team through a “hands on” training experience. The training will involve both classroom training and an opportunity to observe a national rapid response team in action in four communities across the U.S. For further information about the project, visit www.statehighwaysafety.org/html/projects/udpp.

NAGHSR Survey

In its third Survey of the States, NAGHSR surveyed Governor’s highway safety representatives on underage drinking. The purpose of the survey was to determine their programs and activities in the areas of prevention/education, enforcement, public policy, media relations, and efforts for local programs to achieve self-sufficiency. Thirty-nine states responded, providing information on the work of statewide coalitions organized to prevent underage drinking, the types of data gathered to determine the nature and extent of the problem, the types of prevention/education and enforcement activities and programs that are conducted, and whether the state has any statewide public awareness effort.

Funding for the wide variety of underage drinking prevention programs and activities that are currently underway throughout the U.S. comes primarily from The Transportation Equity Act of the 21st



Century or TEA-21. TEA-21 continues funding under Section 402 of the Highway Safety Act, which is targeted at state and community highway safety programs. As evidenced from the survey, states are successfully using a portion of these block grant funds to target the growing problem of underage drinking. Other sources of funding include the Section 410 program that provides incentive funds for impaired driving programs and the Section 163 program that provides funding for states that enact and enforce .08 BAC laws.

Additionally, states in compliance with the open container and repeat offender requirements can use the funds transferred from highway construction programs for impaired driving purposes. Also, 16 states have been designated as the funding agencies for the OJJDP's Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws Program.

States that are not OJJDP lead agencies cooperate extensively with the agency designated by the Governor to receive those funds.

Twenty-six states reported that they had formed a statewide underage drinking prevention coalition or were using an existing coalition to address the issue. In terms of data collection, states collect data on alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes, fatalities, injuries and arrests; use survey results (particularly the Centers for Disease Control Youth Behavioral Risk Survey) that address underage drinking; and review liquor law violations including purchase, attempts to purchase, possession and consumption. Several states collect information on liquor licensees that had been cited for sales to minor violations.

Prevention/Education Activities

The states reported a wide range of activities. Nineteen states distribute printed information or videos on underage drinking, six states produce

public service announcements and three states (Mississippi, Utah and Washington) make extensive use of radio to get out the message on the dangers of underage drinking. Other popular programs include peer education/counseling/training (10 states) and the distribution of mini-grants (10 states). Nine states conduct safety presentations or assemblies. In Virginia, a hospital conducts a program called "Reality Check" where teens visit the local trauma center to see the tragedy caused by underage drinking. Six states provide specific information to parents such as the Ohio program called "Parents Who Host, Lose the Most."

Eight states conduct social marketing or norming campaigns that inform students on the actual rather than perceived "norm" for drinking.

Fourteen states conduct youth forums, summits or conferences with catchy titles such as the "Get A Grip Conference" in Iowa, "Take A Stand" in Kansas, and the YELL (Youth to Eliminate the Loss of Life) conference in Delaware. In three states (Arkansas, North Carolina and Ohio), the First Lady of the state has taken an active role through the Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol

Free program. Seven states have formed Youth Councils. In Oregon, OSSOM (Oregon Student Safety On the Move) is involved with transportation safety issues in schools and local communities, and includes parents and families.

Other prevention/education activities include: crashed car displays or reenactments (six states); support for alcohol- and drug-free prom and graduation celebrations (five states); victim impact panels (three states); art contests (three states); presentations by emergency room nurses (three states); Youth In Action leadership training (three states); and alternative activities (two states).



Eighteen states have developed a statewide public awareness campaign on the issue of underage drinking and used creative themes to capture the attention of both youth and adults. Some of the examples include “Don’t Pull A Stupid Trick” in Illinois, “U Drink U Drive U Lose” in Louisiana, “Zip, Zero, Zilch” in Michigan, “Stand Tall; Don’t Fall: United Against Underage Drinking” in Nevada, “Booze It & Lose It” in North Carolina, “None Under 21” in Ohio, and “You Don’t Have to Be Buzzed to Be Busted” in Washington.

Many states had programs to reach diverse audiences. Eleven states provided information on underage drinking in Spanish, five states targeted Native Americans and one state has a program for Vietnamese youth. In Idaho, the state has targeted underage youth in the military.

College Programs

The majority of states identified the college/university community as a special target audience. Three states (Georgia, Michigan and Utah) have developed a statewide program targeting colleges and universities. Four states (North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Washington) have developed campus coalitions, and three states (Illinois, Ohio and Virginia) host conferences aimed at the college audience. Virginia’s college conference, sponsored by the Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, has been conducted for the past 16 years. Three states conduct freshman orientation programs, three provide specific information on binge or high-risk drinking and two states have Spring Break programs. Six states have developed special programs or campaigns including the FOCUS (Fighting Off Campus Underage Drinking Sales) in Louisiana, “Designated Drivers Do It for Friends” in New Mexico, “Operation Safe Fall” in Rhode Island and the Alcohol Education Project in Texas.

Enforcement

Twenty-five states conduct compliance checks to insure liquor licensees are obeying the law and 23 states conduct Cops In Shops programs where police officers are stationed in liquor outlets to apprehend underage youth who attempt to purchase alcohol. In addition to these enforcement initiatives, eight states have some type of party patrol program that apprehends youth who are drinking illegally at a party, and four states have a toll free tip line. Three states (Michigan, Pennsylvania and Virginia) also have training programs for liquor licensees. Several states, responding to unique circumstances, have developed special programs. In California they have targeted youth who travel into Mexico where the drinking age is 18. Hawaii has a program to deal with rave parties and in Mississippi personnel conduct court monitoring.

Conclusion

When asked whether their efforts have been successful, the majority of respondents responded positively, citing increased public awareness of the problem of underage drinking, greater cooperation among state and local organizations, decreases in alcohol use, alcohol motor vehicle crashes, fatalities, injuries and arrests, more parental involvement, increased attention from the media, and key public policy changes.

Although significant progress has been made in underage drinking and driving over the past decade, considerable more work needs to be done. Few underage drinking programs are self-sufficient and too few focus on enforcement of state and local liquor laws. More evaluation of state underage programs should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of these efforts. Prevention programs for underage drinking and driving must be tied more closely to other underage drinking programs funded from other federal sources. Despite these shortcomings, underage drinking will continue to be a priority for State Highway Safety Offices and significant activity will be undertaken to address the problem.

The National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives (NAGHSR) is the states' voice on highway safety. The 501(c)(3) non-profit association represents the highway safety programs of states and territories on the human behavioral aspects of highway safety. For more information or to order previous surveys on seat belts or aggressive driving, call (202) 789-0942. The Association's activities and viewpoints are regularly updated online at www.statehighwaysafety.org.

