Safe and sober holidays and beyond

Parental involvement is key to reducing underage drinking

CHICAGO – The Illinois Liquor Control Commission (ILCC) and more than fifty organizations and elected officials across the state are launching a campaign designed to encourage Illinois parents to help reduce the incidence of underage and binge drinking. Since this type of drinking often increases during the holiday season, the campaign is launching just before New Year’s Eve.

The ILCC parental responsibility campaign will bring all of Illinois together to stop this unhealthy and unwanted behavior which often ends in a tragedy, such as a fatal car accident, drug addiction, and violent behavior,

“The holidays, and especially New Years Eve, are times for celebrations, and alcohol is often a part of the equation,” said Gloria Materre, Executive Director of the ILCC. “Underage drinking is a common occurrence during the winter break, especially when the clock strikes midnight.”

Illinoisans can prevent underage drinking if parents and guardians take an active role in communicating with their children about the dangers of this type of behavior early and often in their upbringing. Surprisingly, studies have shown that underage drinkers most often obtain alcohol from their home, or from someone they know who purchased it for them, such as a family friend, parent or guardian or another relative old enough to purchase liquor. A November 2008 study revealed that 69.4% of underage drinkers (an estimated 7.3 million person) did not purchase that last alcohol they consumed—it was free from someone else who was legally able to purchase alcohol, according to SAMSHA (Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration).

Parents are the most important factor in determining whether young people drink. Three-quarters of young people, age 12 and up, acknowledge they are less likely to drink if they know their parents disapprove of this behavior. Until parents let their children know this is unacceptable and, enforce these rules at home, young people will continue to risk their lives or futures on underage and/or binge drinking according to the IYS (Illinois Youth Survey) 2010.

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“A cultural shift to reduce the tragic results of underage drinking has to start at home,” said Materre. “Parents and friends must be willing to talk to their children and let them know that underage drinking is unacceptable.” Schools, law enforcement agencies and the liquor industry have been fighting to reduce the sale of beer, wine and spirits to underage customers. These efforts have paid off with higher compliance rates by businesses licensed to sell alcohol and through more enforcement activities associated with special events and underage drinkers.

Annette Czech, president of the Illinois PTA, knows firsthand the impact parents can have on preventing underage drinking. “Every year we see more alcohol-related incidents over the winter break where kids begin experimenting with alcohol on New Year’s Eve. From car accidents to being drunk and disorderly, Parents report more incidents to us at this time than ever. Parental involvement is crucial in preventing these tragedies.”

*It is estimated that underage drinking costs the State of Illinois nearly one billion a year in medical care and work loss. When including the expenses from pain and suffering, the costs balloon to over $3 billion a year from these injuries.*