



HPC Works to Prevent Underage Drinking during Graduation Week

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HARTFORD – Next to a link to how students can order a 2011 graduation ceremony video on the Hartford School District website is a link to the Hartford Prevention Coalition (HPC).

HPC is a coalition of parents, teachers, youth, town and state officials, law enforcement, members of the court system and business people who have a common vision about underage drinking. One: Minors do not have ready access to alcohol, either from retailers or from family and friends. Two: All who use alcohol illegally or enable others to do so face clear and inescapable consequences. Three: Hartford residents fully understand the mental and physical damage caused by alcohol abuse.

“Communities need to bring this issue to the forefront and remind young people that they are not alone – this is everyone’s responsibility to work together to prevent underage drinking, especially during high risk times such as graduation week,” said Marcia LaPlante, prevention services chief for the Vermont Department of Health.

Hartford is one of more than 30 communities around the state that receives grant money from the Health Department to prevent underage drinking and substance abuse. Alcohol abuse in Vermont continues to be a major public health problem, and drinking habits start early. The age when a young person starts drinking is a strong predictor of alcohol dependence. According to the 2009 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 36 percent of all eighth through 12th graders and half of all seniors reported drinking alcohol in the past month. One in five students binge drink (have five or more drinks of alcohol within a couple of hours).

Easy access to alcohol and perception of risk matter, too. In 2009, 77 percent of seniors reported that alcohol is easy to get, and 41 percent believe there is little risk in drinking nearly every day. Most students (76%) get alcohol by someone giving it to them or by giving someone money to buy it for them.

To change this, HPC is promoting a “sticker shock” campaign to discourage adults from purchasing alcohol for minors. The bright, yellow stickers are posted on beverage coolers at five gas stations in the White River Junction area and read: “The Sale of Alcohol to a Minor is Illegal.”

Valerie Gardner, a former principal at Champlain Valley Union High School and now director of the Vermont School Leadership Project for the Snelling Center for Government, said any message about ‘not drinking’ was generally blocked out by many kids.

“My message was much more practical,” Gardner said. “This is a time when people are celebratory – you’ve accomplished much and are moving to a new time of life. In order to make sure that this remains a special time, please think, watch out for each other, and take responsibility for watching out for each other’s safety.”

The Hartford School District’s website also features a link to ParentUpVT.org. ParentUpVT.org provides prevention tips such as how to plan alcohol-free celebrations, as well as community resource information and videos about talking with young people about alcohol:

- Warning Signs of Underage Drinking
- Talking to Your Middle Schooler About Alcohol
- Talking with Your Teen About Alcohol
- Underage Drinking: Risks for Parents

A direct link to the videos is: http://www.healthvermont.gov/adap/underage_drinking/videos.aspx.

For more information visit healthvermont.gov, and ParentUpvt.org.

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