



Traffic Safety Facts Banner

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EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMS TO DETER UNDERAGE DRINKING AND DRIVING

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for youth 15 to 20 year olds. In 2002, 3,827 drivers age 15 to 20 years died in crashes. Twenty-four percent of the drivers in this age range who died in crashes had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08 or higher.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has been studying the effectiveness of laws and programs designed to reduce alcohol-related fatalities among youth. NHTSA estimates that Minimum Drinking Age Laws, which all states now have, have reduced traffic fatalities involving drivers aged 18 to 20 by 13%, and have saved an estimated 21,887 lives since 1975. And Zero Tolerance laws for youth, where it is against the law in all states for youth to drive after consuming any alcohol, have been shown to be very effective in states with strong enforcement (see Traffic Tech #229, August 2000).

Mid-America Research Institute recently completed a study for NHTSA to examine the effectiveness of four community programs to deter underage drinking. All of the programs were modeled after a program in the Washington, DC area known as WRAP (Washington Regional Alcohol Program). Representatives in each community first conducted a community assessment and then developed a strategic plan to meet their needs and objectives.

Safe and Sober Youth (SASY) in Chesterfield County, Virginia

SASY implemented a number of programs to deter underage drinking. In Virginia, initial drivers' licenses for youth are granted by a judge in a courtroom, so one initiative included working with local judges to emphasize the dangers of impaired driving when they administered initial drivers' licenses. They coordinated countywide prom and graduation programs. They conducted numerous high school assembly programs, including one with a member of Congress as a presenter. They also developed a speakers' bureau to provide presentations to local civic and school groups.

Project Extra Mile (PEM) in Omaha, Nebraska

PEM worked in the areas of public policy, enforcement and adjudication, information and education, and reducing access and availability of alcohol. PEM published and distributed a monthly newsletter. They encouraged local merchants not to advertise beer at Halloween using characters that appeal to youth. They worked with law enforcement to conduct "stings" where underage youth attempt to buy alcohol from merchants. PEM held a breakfast for state senators and candidates at which issues about underage drinking were discussed. PEM also has a Youth in Action component where young people testify at legislative hearings and work on other PEM initiatives.

Salt Lake City Underage Drinking Prevention Project (SLCUDPP)

Salt Lake City concentrated their efforts on enforcement and youth peer programs. Several local law enforcement agencies participated in a *Cops in Shops* program where officers in civilian clothes are in liquor outlets to check for underage youth attempting to buy alcohol. One focus of the youth peer program was the development of *Teen Courts* in which peers determine the appropriate punishments to underage youth who are found to have been drinking alcohol.

Travis County Underage Drinking Prevention Program (TCUDPP) in Travis County, Texas

Among this program's activities was the development of a video called "*Why Risk It?*" that was shown at school, halfway houses, recreation centers, and fairs. A focus of the program was to make presentations in the schools about issues surrounding underage drinking. The program also scheduled community service work for violators of the Texas zero tolerance laws.

Evaluation of Programs

The ultimate objective of any traffic safety program is to reduce losses caused by some specified class of traffic crashes, in this case alcohol-related crashes involving youthful drivers. Success in accomplishing this objective is extremely difficult to measure for community programs. This is because of the necessity to show that any reductions were not due to chance alone. Changes of this magnitude require that behavioral changes occur in a large percentage of the target population. Nevertheless, it is important to see if such changes are occurring and can be detected.

For each program, the number of nighttime injury crashes involving drivers under 21 was examined in time series analyses. Except for the data from Salt Lake City, the analyses did not show a significant change in crash occurrence. Analysis of the Salt Lake City data indicated a slight trend towards a reduction in crashes with young drivers. It should be noted that none of the programs were designed specifically to reduce crashes, but rather to reduce underage drinking.

Conclusions

This evaluation focused on whether the four community programs included in this study had an impact on nighttime injury crashes involving young drivers. Only one of the programs, the program in Salt Lake City, which had a strong emphasis on enforcement, showed an indication of a reduction in measures of such crashes, but this was not statistically significant.

These programs, however, had other, more immediate objectives believed to be important for reducing crashes in the long-term, such as establishing local coalitions or reducing sales to minors and underage drinking. It was not possible in this study to evaluate the programs' success in achieving these objectives.

HOW TO ORDER

For a copy of *An Impact Evaluation of Underage Drinking Prevention Projects* (28 pages), write to the Office of Research and Technology, NHTSA, NTI-130, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590, or send a fax to (202) 366-7096. Amy Berning was the project manager for this study.

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Traffic Tech is a publication to disseminate information about traffic safety programs, including evaluations, innovative programs, and new publications. Feel free to copy it as you wish. If you would like to receive a copy, contact Linda Cosgrove, Ph.D. or Patty Ellison-Potter, Ph.D., Editors, fax (202) 366-7096, e-mail: Patricia.Ellison-Potter@nhtsa.dot.gov

