

# San Diego Survey on Social Host Laws

*San Diego Countywide Media Advocacy Project • August, 2003*

**S**an Diegans overwhelmingly believe it is wrong for adults to provide alcohol to minors, according to a comprehensive telephone survey commissioned by the nonprofit Institute for Public Strategies (IPS) for the Social Availability Committee of the San Diego County Policy Panel on Youth Access to Alcohol.

## *Methodology*

A survey of 750 San Diego County residents 21 years of age or older was conducted randomly by the Social Science Research Laboratory at San Diego State University during June 2003. The results are representative of all county residents by age, gender and racial/ethnic group. Respondents had the option to conduct the interview in English or Spanish. The survey sample margin of error was +/- 3.6% at the 95th percentile confidence interval. IPS commissioned the survey under contract with the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Alcohol and Drug Services.

## *Summary of Findings*

**R**esidents in San Diego want local municipalities to adopt "social host" ordinances that hold adults accountable for underage drinking at house parties, even when adults are not at home. Furthermore, San Diegans support law enforcement efforts to recover costs incurred from underage drinking parties. Currently, eight cities in the county – El Cajon, Encinitas, Escondido, La Mesa, Oceanside, Poway, San Diego and Santee – have passed similar ordinances. Led by the San Diego Board of Supervisors, a newly implemented county ordinance covering unincorporated areas allows law enforcement officers to charge adults with a misdemeanor if they host parties in which minors are provided alcohol. Conviction on the charge could mean a \$1,000 fine

and six months in jail. Adults could also be ordered to repay additional costs incurred by law enforcement and face civil and criminal liability.

## **YOUTH ACCESS TO ALCOHOL**

- 53% of respondents feel the issue of adults providing alcohol to minors under the age of 21 is a serious problem.
- 91% of respondents in San Diego County agree that it is wrong for an adult to provide alcohol to a minor.

## **SOCIAL HOST POLICY**

- 60% of respondents believe it is always wrong for parents to provide alcohol to their children ages 15-17 in their home as a safer alternative to consuming alcohol outside the home.
- For youth ages 18-20, over half of the respondents strongly agree that parents are responsible for ensuring that underage youth do not hold parties in their home, even when the parents are out of town. For youth ages 15-17, 62% of respondents strongly agree.
- 25% of San Diego adults surveyed are aware of the social host ordinance.

## ENFORCEMENT

- 54% of residents who responded in San Diego feel the \$1,000 fine is severe enough for violators of social host laws; 30% feel it is not severe enough.
- 65% of San Diego residents surveyed believe law enforcement costs to respond to underage drinking party disturbances should be recovered from those responsible for the party.
- 41% of respondents think adults would be arrested in their community by police for providing alcohol at a party attended by minors in their home.
- 59% of respondents think it is likely that adults who are observed providing alcohol to a minor at a convenience store, grocery store or gas station will be arrested by police.

### ***Background on Underage Drinking and Social Host Ordinances***

At local and national levels, home parties have repeatedly been identified as the primary source by which youth obtain alcohol (The San Diego Alcohol Survey, Poll on Alcohol Promotions and Youth, 2001; Institute for Public Strategies; Combating Underage Drinking Survey, 1999; Mayer Forster, Murray and Wagenaar, 1998). Local surveys suggest that 60 to 80 percent of junior and senior high school students obtain alcohol from home parties, with 30 percent reporting that they consume alcohol at home with their parents permission (The East County Rural Project: Underage Drinking in the Mountain Empire, 2002, Institute for Public Strategies).

Social host liability laws are among the most effective forms of public policy to reduce binge drinking and driving (Stout, Sloan, Liang & Davis, 2000, *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*). Because California's laws are limited

in holding social hosts accountable, municipalities are taking a stronger approach locally to address the issue.

Social hosting refers to adults providing alcohol or allowing underage drinking to occur in private settings; social host ordinances are proposed as a solution. In 2002 the City of Poway adopted an ordinance holding adults accountable for serving alcohol to minors in private settings – the first of its kind in San Diego County ([www.nicpp.org](http://www.nicpp.org)). Several local municipalities are holding adults who provide alcohol to minors accountable in San Diego ([www.alcoholpolicypanel.org](http://www.alcoholpolicypanel.org)). In addition, sanctioning civil penalties after a third party has been injured or killed, the county social host law holds adults accountable by imposing fines and allowing police departments to recover costs incurred in breaking up private parties where underage drinking occurs (Adult Accountability for Underage Drinking: The Case for Social Host Laws, IPS, 2003).

Based on this research and experience, local municipalities should:

- 1) Hold adults responsible when they are not home
- 2) Contain cost recovery for law enforcement
- 3) Have criminal and civil liability for adults who provide alcohol to minors.



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