

Underage Drinking in the Mountain Empire Region

East County Rural Project • August, 2002

Alcohol and other drug use among youth in San Diego's Mountain Empire region continues to be a substantial problem. Results of a recent survey show that a large number of frequent drinkers* had their first drink at age 8 or younger. In addition, students identified as frequent drinkers were more likely to use other drugs and use them more frequently.

The poll was designed to learn more about how the use of alcohol affects life in the Mountain Empire region by asking students about their opinions and experiences with alcohol and other drugs. The survey results in this fact sheet pertain to a set of questions about underage drinking and other drug use; youth access to alcohol; and drinking and driving patterns among Mountain Empire youth.

Methodology

The poll of 158 students in grades 11 and 12 was conducted on December 12, 2001, at Mountain Empire High School. The results are representative by grade level, gender and ethnicity. The questionnaire was designed so that no student could be identified. The Institute for Public Strategies, in cooperation with the Mountain Empire Collaborative, commissioned the poll under contract with the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Alcohol and Drug Services, in cooperation with the Mountain Empire Collaborative.

Summary of Findings

The survey finds that students at the Mountain Empire High School who are considered to be frequent drinkers are more likely to engage in other risky

behaviors such as DUI and other drug use; have their first drink of alcohol at age 8 or younger; and to visit Mexican bars or buy alcohol at Mexican liquor stores. In addition, a large number of students report getting alcohol at home or at private parties.

ALCOHOL, MARIJUANA AND TOBACCO USE

- 80% of students who responded had at least one drink of alcohol during their lifetime.
- 36% of frequent drinkers reported using marijuana daily, compared to only 8% of non-frequent drinkers.
- Nearly 41% of frequent drinkers reported using tobacco daily, compared to only 3% of non-frequent drinkers.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

- 17% of students had ridden in a car at least once with a driver who had been drinking in the 30 days prior to the survey.

* A frequent drinker is defined in this survey as someone who either drank on more than 10 days of the past 30; drank 5 or more drinks in a row on more than 6 days of the past 30; or drank 5 or more drinks in a row on more than 4 days of the past 14.

- Frequent drinkers were significantly more likely (31%) than non-frequent drinkers (14%) to have ridden in a car with a driver who had been drinking.
- During the 30 days prior to the survey, 10% of the students had driven a car or motorcycle after drinking.
- Frequent drinkers (35%) were significantly more likely than non-frequent drinkers (5%) to drive after drinking.

INITIATION OF ALCOHOL USE

- 28% of the students had first consumed alcohol before the age of 13 years.
- Male students (35%) were significantly more likely than female students (21%) to have drunk an alcoholic beverage before the age of 13.
- Frequent drinkers (42%) were far more likely than non-frequent drinkers to have had their first drink at age 8 or younger.

ACCESS TO ALCOHOL IN MEXICO

- 30% of frequent drinkers had visited Mexico more than 20 times in the previous 12 months.
- Of those students who visited Mexico in the previous 12 months, 17% had visited Mexican bars more than 20 times and 9% had bought alcohol at a Mexican liquor store more than 20 times.
- Hispanic students (50%) were significantly more likely than white students (32%) to have visited a Mexican bar in the past 12 months.

ACCESS TO ALCOHOL AT HOME OR PARTIES

- 62% of male students in the 11th grade and 80% of males in the 12th grade said they obtain

alcohol from home or at parties.

- 66% of female students in the 11th grade and 60% of females in the 12th grade said they obtain alcohol from home or at parties.

"EVERY 15 MINUTES" PROGRAM

The following results pertain to questions about the "Every 15 Minutes" crash program that was held at the Mountain Empire High School in May, 2001.

- 37% of respondents said they had chosen not to drink and drive since the "Every 15 Minute" crash program.
- 36% said they had told someone not to drink and drive since the program.
- 31% said they are more aware of the laws and consequences of underage drinking.
- 24% reported that they had refused to ride with someone who was drinking and driving.



The Institute for Public Strategies is a nonprofit organization with local and national projects advancing public health through changes in policy and community norms. For more information about the Mountain Empire High School Survey and related topics, call Scott Southward at (619) 474-8844, ext. 14, or e-mail ssouthward@publicstrategies.org. A copy of this fact sheet can be downloaded online at www.publicstrategies.org. Click on "projects" to find the East County Rural home page.

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