

TEEN DRINKING

Coalition warns parents about underage drinking

'Social Host' violators can be fined \$500 or more

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Summer moviegoers at the Century Napa Valley theater may have noticed a new public service announcement ahead of the previews. The announcement, which runs 11 minutes before all PG-13 and R-rated movies, warns against underage drinking and reminds the audience of the hefty fines they face for providing alcohol to teens.

Napa County's "Social Host" law allows civil fines to be given to the host of an underage drinking party. A fine of \$500 is charged for the first offense. A second offense will cost \$750, and the fine for a third violation is \$1,000. Offenders may also be billed for the public safety response costs, according to the Napa County Catalyst Coalition.

The Catalyst Coalition is a program from the Napa County Office of Education that works to prevent underage alcohol and marijuana use. The coalition works in collaboration with several community agencies, including local law enforcement.

The Social Host law has been enacted in all jurisdictions in Napa County, which is rare compared with the rest of the state, said Jennifer Stewart of the Office of Education. In other counties throughout California, it's typical for only a few jurisdictions in a single county to adopt Social Host laws.

In 2011, the Napa Police Department responded to 961 disturbance calls and issued 13 Social Host citations. In 2012, the department responded to 636 disturbance calls and issued only eight Social Host citations.

For Stewart, these numbers are encouraging.

"We expected to see citations go up and then go down," Stewart said. "Going from 13 to eight (citations) is good. It's a sign that it's working."

In most cases, parents aren't intentionally hosting teen drinking parties, nor are they supplying the alcohol. They are, however, turning a blind eye and allowing these parties to take place on their property, Napa Police Lt. Debbie Peecook said.

Under the Social Host law, the person responsible for the property will be fined, even if that person is unaware that teen drinking is taking place, Peecook said. And if injuries, alcohol poisoning or sexual assaults occur at the party, the host could also be held criminally liable.

Liliana Gaona, who will be a junior at Napa High School this year, said girls should be especially careful at drinking parties so that no one takes advantage of them. Being drunk can put girls at a higher risk of being abused physically or sexually, said Angie Ruiz, also a Napa High junior.

Gaona and Ruiz both work as prevention advocates for the Napa County Office of Education's

Mariposa program. Mariposa is a prevention program aimed at middle and high school-aged Latina youths.

Ruiz said most teens get alcohol from parties; the kids will open the parents' liquor cabinet or they'll find an older person to buy them alcohol.

"Many parents don't really know exactly what's going on," Gaona said.

Most teen drinking parties nowadays are small, with about 10 to 12 kids, Peecook said. About a decade ago, the parties were much larger with 40 to 50 kids, she said.

"Kids are doing smaller, intimate parties because they don't want to draw attention to themselves," Peecook said.

While it's technically OK for parents to serve some alcohol to their own child, it crosses the line when a child is over-served or if a child is really young, Peecook said. And under no circumstances is a parent allowed to serve alcohol to any children other than their own, she said.

"True, you can give your kid a glass of wine at dinner," Peecook said. "But you can't give a glass of wine to every kid in the neighborhood."

Underage drinking laws in Napa County

- It is illegal for anyone under 21 to possess or consume alcohol.
- It is illegal to supply alcohol to a minor.
- It is illegal to host parties where underage drinking occurs.

However, 1 in 3 Napa County teens gets alcohol at parties or homes.

(Source: Napa County Catalyst Coalition)