



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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GIRLS' FIGHTS LINKED TO UNDERAGE DRINKING ***Adults Encouraged to Keep Alcohol from Minors***

April is National Alcohol Awareness Month and also the time when teens throughout the County and across the country start thinking about prom and how to celebrate. Unfortunately, some of them will consider drinking.

Elected and health officials, community members, parents, and teens gathered today outside the County Administration Center to talk about how underage drinking sometimes leads to fights and adolescent violence among boys and girls.

"Violence linked to alcohol can be prevented," said Chairwoman Pam Slater-Price, County of San Diego Board of Supervisors. "Young people should not be drinking. We need everyone's help in keeping alcohol away from minors," added Slater-Price, who was joined by Nick Macchione, Director of the County's Health and Human Services Agency; Dr. Michael Sise, Medical Director of Trauma Services, Scripps Mercy Hospital; and Elizabeth Urquhart, Director of Phoenix House San Diego.

According to the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, in the past year, about one in four girls between 12 and 17 years of age had been the perpetrator of or had participated in a violent act at school or work, participated in a group-against-group fight, or attacked others with the intent to seriously hurt them.

The survey also revealed that adolescent females that engaged in a violent behavior were more likely to have been binge drinking in the past month.

"We often associate acts of teenage violence with boys; however, the problem is also pervasive among girls," said Macchione. "It's extremely important to remind girls, and boys, that there are more constructive ways of handling stress and anger. Violence is never the answer."

While in the past, girls and boys exhibited different rates of violence, in the last few years, arrests for girls have increased more rapidly than arrests for boys, with girls accounting for about 30 percent of all arrests nationwide.

Locally, statistics from the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) revealed 164 adolescents who were arrested in 2008 were interviewed; 25 percent of those were girls under 17 years of age.

The SANDAG report also revealed that a higher percentage of girls were arrested for violent behavior compared to boys; 37 percent versus 31 percent.

Minors sometimes get alcohol from older friends. They get alcohol from strangers willing to buy it for them or store clerks who fail to check ids. Minors get alcohol from their friend's parents and their own parents.

Every unincorporated area and 17 of the 18 cities in the County have a social host ordinance making it illegal to give alcohol to minors. This includes parties, gatherings or events on private property. Doing so is a misdemeanor and punishable by a fine of 1,000 dollars, six months in jail or both.

Parents who suspect their child might have a drinking problem are encouraged to call the County of San Diego Access and Crisis Line at (800) 479-3339 or 211.

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