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## Buckeye police's 2-month-old party patrol showing results

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By Jackee Coe

If parents have to pick up the tab when minors are caught drinking, will they be more vigilant? That's the thinking behind a handful of cities in Arizona that hold adults financially accountable for underage drinking. A grass-roots group in Buckeye hopes the southwest Valley town will become the first in Maricopa County to follow suit.

The Way Out West Coalition, a community effort led by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America and Youth Evaluation and Treatment Centers, is drafting a social-host ordinance that would stick adults enabling teen drinking with fines.

The measure would be paired with Buckeye's 2-month-old party patrol - a pair of police officers who break up parties and teen gatherings where minors are drinking.

"What this is intended to do is just take away that ability from the kids or to make the consequences a little more severe," said Ed Eddingfield, the Buckeye program director for the Partnership for a Drug-Free America.

Drinking is Buckeye teens' most pressing issue, according to the coalition, which spent the past year conducting and analyzing research, then developing a strategy to address the problem.

But underage drinking isn't unique to Buckeye.

In the Valley, there are 18 coalitions that receive funding for substance-abuse prevention through Magellan Health Services, the regional behavioral-health authority for Maricopa County.

Ten of the 18 coalitions identified underage drinking as a problem they're combating, including groups in Tempe, Chandler and Laveen.

According to the 2008 Arizona Youth Survey, nearly half of 12th-graders in Maricopa County reported drinking alcohol in the previous 30 days, and about three-fourths of 12th-graders reported drinking alcohol at least once in their lives.

The numbers are even higher in Buckeye.

"Statewide, when you look at what is the Number 1 drug of choice for kids, it is alcohol," said Shelly Mowrey, a program director for the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. "(But) it was higher in Buckeye than the average in Maricopa County."

**Adults play a role**

Half of Buckeye teens drink alcohol largely because there aren't strong enough consequences, coalition research showed. Most said they get alcohol from adults, including parents and older siblings, and drink in their homes.

Councilman Brian McAchran, a former Buckeye police officer, is one of the coalition members crafting Buckeye's social-host ordinance.

"Some parents (think) . . . 'As long as you're drinking here, at least you're not drinking elsewhere.' Well, that does not make it all right, and it contributes to our problem, and so this will give the officers a way to deal with it," McAchran said. "And what it does is, it holds parents or adults financially responsible and puts a huge incentive (on) not allowing parties and being accountable."

Buckeye would fine the adult who is responsible for the property where minors are drinking. Adults would be allowed to take a training class and avoid fines, which are yet to be set, if they're first-time offenders.

"The whole idea is that no one should ever be hit with this blindly," Eddingfield said. "Maybe the first time you could say, 'Well, I didn't know about it.' But after the first time, you would know about it."

The goal is "to have the parents take responsibility for what's going on at their home," he added.

The town ordinance would be a civil violation and could work in conjunction with an existing statewide criminal violation: contributing to the delinquency of a minor, a misdemeanor.

Under state laws, an adult must supply a minor with alcohol to be cited. But under Buckeye's ordinance, an adult could be cited if teens are drinking on property for which they are responsible, regardless of whether the adult supplied the alcohol.

Cities in 32 states have social-host ordinances, according to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, including Tucson, Casa Grande, Coolidge, Eloy, Superior and Miami in Arizona.

### **Crashing teen parties**

While the legal measures are aimed at adults, party patrols target youths.

Tempe's party patrol has been "pretty effective" in curbing underage drinking and crimes associated with parties, such as criminal damage and assault, police spokesman Steve Carbajal said.

"All of our officers really try to combat underage drinking, especially being so close to ASU. That's a big problem for us at a lot of parties, so the party patrol is one way that we do that," Carbajal said.

"Our goal is, if we can respond to the party and take appropriate action . . . (then) we can avoid some of those crimes or prevent some from happening later on down the road."

Since Buckeye's party patrol began Nov. 13, officers have made more than 250 contacts and issued 60-plus citations, such as minor consumption and contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Buckeye police Lt. Phil Harris, who oversees the squad, said police are on pace to exceed the expectations they set for the first six months.

During the patrol's first weekend, officers broke up a house party and issued 34 citations, including nine for minor consumption and 22 for curfew violations. But the numbers have fallen since, Harris said, perhaps because word of the patrol is spreading, or people don't congregate as often in colder weather.

Craig Ramsey, 15, a sophomore at Buckeye Union High School, supports the patrol.

"It could make a huge difference," he said. "It could prevent a lot of accidents and stuff like that, prevent a lot of kids from getting alcohol poisoning and drinking when they're not supposed to."

Typically, when officers come across parties or teen gatherings, they line up everybody, check IDs and administer breath tests when there are indicators of underage alcohol use, Harris said. Citations may be issued for curfew violations for youths who are under 18 and out past Buckeye's 10 p.m. curfew.

Buckeye officers use several strategies to track down teen drinking. They answer calls related to kids gathering, patrol areas where teens are known to hang out, make traffic stops and respond to reports of house parties, Harris said. Police also are teaming with the Arizona State Liquor Board to conduct stings at businesses suspected of selling alcohol to minors.

Edgingfield hopes the drop in citations is a sign that police efforts are working.

We are doing a lot to change things up to make sure that we're addressing a very broad spectrum of times and areas, and not just targeting one small area of the town or one small segment of time," he said.

<b>Party patrol citations</b>									
	<b>Nov. 13-14</b>	<b>Nov. 20-21</b>	<b>Nov. 27-28</b>	<b>Dec. 4-5</b>	<b>Dec. 11-12</b>	<b>Dec. 18-19</b>	<b>Dec. 26</b>	<b>Dec. 31 - Jan. 1</b>	<b>Jan. 9</b>
Minor consumption	9	2	2	1	1	2	0	0	2
Curfew	22	4	5	3	0	1	0	2	0
Contributing	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Traffic	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Drugs	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Contacts	52	35	28	41	34	29	1	32	13

Source: Buckeye Police Department.