

Seven local businesses caught serving minors In a recent state investigation aimed at reducing underage drinking, 31 businesses passed in Silverthorne and Dillon; Seven were issued a summons

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SUMMIT COUNTY — Dressed age appropriately, not carrying fake IDs and ready to honestly answer that they are under 21, they recently made their way through bars, gas stations, liquor stores and restaurants in Silverthorne and Dillon.

In 31 locations, these underage young adults attempted to purchase alcohol and at five places in Dillon and two in Silverthorne they were successful, officials said.

The server or seller who failed the compliance checks were issued a criminal summons with a court date. The businesses - four restaurants/bars, two gas stations and a liquor store - may be facing a fine between \$200 and \$5,000 based on their liquor sales or liquor license suspension for a couple days.

“Every year we’re suffering deaths from alcohol consumption. ... All we are trying to do is stop underage drinking,” said Chief of Investigations Ken Peterson with the Colorado Department of Revenue’s Liquor and Tobacco Enforcement Division, which conducted the checks last weekend.

The enforcement investigations are part of a grant to division from the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Peterson explained. And enforcement is just one aspect of what they are trying to do, he continued. Through the grants that are issued across the country, the state department is also trying to do educational outreach and prevent underage drinking.

Before receiving it in 2005, the state average for serving to minors was at 39 percent, Peterson said. The first year of the grant, that number dropped to 18 percent and since 2006 it has been about 24 percent.

“This is still too high,” Peterson said, adding that he would like to see it drop about four points.

During the investigations, persons between 18 and 20 enter the establishments wearing audio and sometimes also video surveillance. Investigators nearby listen to the conversations and monitor what happens. If the underage person is permitted to buy the alcohol at a store, they turn it over the investigators once they walk out, Peterson said. If it is at a restaurant, they get up and leave once the drink arrives, he added.

Often times, the locations where the state conducts investigations are determined by requests from local law enforcement or by complaints, Peterson said.

However, the single largest problem the division faces is citizens’ perceptions that underage drinking is “not a big deal,” he said. People think that because they did it when they were young, it’s not a problem, he added.

But that is not the case, he continued. “It’s a hazard to their health and a lot of juvenile crimes are committed while they are intoxicated,” Peterson said.

Dillon Police Chief Joe Wray said an investigation like this is “an educational (tool) that we use.” Locally, police are pleased that the majority of businesses aren’t serving minors and for those that incurred violations, they hope to do education to correct that, he added.

The police department is encouraging all those cited to go through training in March with the Summit Prevention Alliance. In fact, the TIPS, Training for Intervention Procedures, is a five-hour class police encourage all those who serve or sell alcohol to attend, Wray said.