

TIPS Courses Help Businesses Prevent Alcohol-Related Incidents

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WALLINGFORD - Alcohol-related accidents kill a person every 30 minutes nationwide, according to statistics from the Connecticut Department of Transportation, and alcohol continues to be the biggest substance abuse problem for American teenagers.

For bartenders or business owners, a small mistake can lead to a liability, but a local program run by the Meriden and Wallingford Substance Abuse Council helps businesses prevent drunk driving, reduce underage drinking and avoid legal trouble.

Training for Intervention Procedures, or TIPS, has become popular in recent years, and representatives of three local establishments attended the three-hour course. The TIPS certification courses cost \$85 per person, but can actually save establishments money because completing the program can reduce insurance liability costs.

On Tuesday, participants learned what signs to look for in underage buyers or drunken customers, as well as how to respond to a variety of situations.

"In many cases, whether in serving alcohol to someone who may be intoxicated or trying to determine whether a customer may be a minor, the only thing that people have are behavioral cues," said Marlene McGann, executive director of the substance abuse council.

"The goal of this program is to show servers how to recognize when there may be a problem and how to respond to a variety of situations."

For bartenders, recognizing the behavior and properly responding can mean the difference between a successful business or facing a lawsuit and dealing with the potential death of a customer.

McGann led the group, which included staff from Michael's Trattoria, the East Street Saloon and the Hungarian Community Club of Wallingford, teaching them a variety of techniques which included how to spot a fake ID or how to "cut off" a customer who has had too much to drink.

Christelle Aube, prevention coordinator with the substance abuse council, said the key to a proper response lies in the six W's: who, what, where, when, why and witnesses.

"In any situation that may involve a minor or intoxicated customer, it's best to document what happens, but the important thing is to remember to document any witnesses as well," she said. "By doing so, you are providing evidence that a reasonable effort was made to comply with all state laws."

The program also gave McGann a chance to explain techniques to prevent underage consumers from purchasing alcohol using fake IDs.

McGann told the group that one of the best ways to determine if an ID may be fake is by simply looking at it, both front and back, and to run their hands over it. If the card is not smooth, particularly if it has a pin sized hole or there is no back side, it can be easily identified as a fake.

If questions still exist, McGann said bartenders have the right to ask for a second form of identification and can even use tools such as a simple site glass provided with the course to look for specific holographic marks on the identification.

The advice given Tuesday might seem simple, but Arpad Buzas, a bartender of the Hungarian club, said it can serve as a beneficial reminder of how to prevent customers from having a bad experience and avoid ending up on the wrong side of the law.

"With all the laws today, it can be very confusing to try and keep up with what is expected or how to prevent becoming a target," said Buzas. "This program serves as a great reminder of what steps should be taken and is a great way for us to make sure our club remains a safe and happy place."