

W.D.M. police credit program with lowering underage alcohol sales

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Many instances of noncompliance are due to lack of knowledge, not intentional lawbreaking, officer says.

An education program for those who serve and sell alcohol played a role in the lower number of underage alcohol sales discovered during 2008 compliance checks, West Des Moines police said.

Only 16 percent of the 146 establishments checked last year were cited for selling or serving alcoholic beverages to underage customers, down 4 percent from 2007.

Officer Tanya Zaglauer is instructor for the Training in Intervention Procedures program. Two types of training are offered - one five-hour session for on-premise alcohol service and another 3 years.

The consequences of a violation can hit a business owner's wallet hard.

A \$710 citation is issued to the employee who sold or provided the alcohol. Based on the number of previous violations, the business can be ticketed with a civil penalty between \$500 and \$1,500 and a suspension of its license to sell alcohol of 14 to 60 days. Businesses with four violations in three years will have their license to sell revoked.

"The fine was hefty for that employee and they lost their job," McCleary said of the violation at Hy-Vee Gas a few years ago.

Police Chief Jack O'Donnell believes the program, as well as cooperation between businesses and the police department, has made a difference in reducing non-compliant checks.

McCleary won't schedule new employees until they complete the program.

"The eyes of our employees are certainly opened when they go to the class. They begin to see that the implications of their decisions can affect their job."