

Medford restaurants fail alcohol compliance checks

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A grade of 91 percent would be good for most high school students taking final exams, but the number doesn't cut it in all situations. When it comes to establishments in the city selling alcohol to minors, authorities will settle for no less than a perfect score.

On Aug. 27, teams of local youths partnered with the Medford Police Department, the Medford Health Department and Medford Health Matters to investigate compliance with underage drinking laws. A series of compliance checks were conducted throughout the city, in which underage people were sent into a liquor store or restaurant to attempt to purchase alcohol.

All 11 of the liquor stores tested refused to sell alcohol to minors; however, three of the 24 restaurants tested failed to refuse the sale. The overall result of the testing was 32 of 35 establishments in compliance, or 91.4 percent.

"Our compliance rate is average, but not where it should be, which is 100 percent," said Penelope Bruce, underage drinking prevention coordinator for the Medford Board of Health and Medford Health Matters.

Between the two rounds of compliance checks conducted in May and August of this year, a total of six out of 40 restaurants (15 percent) have sold alcohol to minors, Bruce said.

Bruce said that for security reasons, youths who participate in the Medford testing are from outside communities, while Medford youths conduct checks in other cities. She said that training is key to making sure the tests go smoothly.

"The youths conducting these investigations with the Medford police go through extensive training to ensure that they do not falsely represent themselves or their age to local merchants," Bruce said. "Compliance checks are conducted regularly in communities like Medford and across the country to ensure that establishments are compliant with state and local minimum drinking age laws."

Police officers are nearby while the checks are being done, both to record violations that may occur and to protect the youths if a problem arises.

Bruce said that businesses should have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to the sale of alcohol to minors, just as the city does.

"Restaurants and liquor store employees should always follow the same rule of thumb — card anyone who appears 35 or younger, no exceptions," Bruce said. "If you are of legal drinking age attempting to purchase alcohol and have a valid ID, do not be offended if you are asked to provide identification. It is everyone's responsibility to keep alcohol out of the hands of minors."

In order to continue fighting the sale of alcohol to minors, members of the Medford Health Department and Medford Police Department are becoming certified trainers in TIPS (Training for Intervention Procedures) this month. According to Bruce, TIPS is training for the responsible service, sale and consumption of alcohol intended to prevent intoxication, underage drinking and drunk driving.

TIPS certification for restaurants and liquor stores is costly, Bruce said, and by having members of the Health and Police departments certified, Medford will be able to provide fast, on-the-spot training to restaurant and liquor store employees at a reduced cost to merchants.

In addition to Bruce, Officers Dave Ciampi and Rory Lockowitz of the Medford Police Department and Karen Rose and Chris Ciarcia of the Medford Board of Health received the TIPS training.

"Another important point of the training is to prevent restaurants from over-serving their guests," Bruce said. "Keeping this in mind, we would also like ensure that there are fewer drunk drivers on the road as well."

Support for compliance checks is provided to Medford Health Matters, the Medford Police Department and the Medford Health Department through the state's Underage Drinking Prevention Grant through the Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, and the federal government's Drug Free Communities Grant through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

For more information about other strategies to prevent and reduce substance use in the city of Medford, go to medfordhealthmatters.org or contact Penelope Bruce at pbruce@medford.org or 781-389-9294.