

Alcohol ordinance has council support

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Sublette County Treatment Court coordinator Kathy Anderson wants to see change, not only in the community's alcohol awareness but also in Pinedale's laws. "We are not, in any way shape or form, anti-alcohol," said Anderson, who's also a member of the Sublette County Prevention Coalition. "We just want to make sure those that are not legal to purchase alcohol have no access to it, and those that are legal do so in a manner that is safe for everybody."

Anderson's quest began in March, after a flurry of citations were issued by the Sublette County Sheriff's Office (SCSO) to a number of employees at area bars who served alcohol to the SCSO's underage decoy. She then approached the Town Council at its March 22 meeting, where she asked that the council take action against the liquor-license holders, including mandatory TIPS (Training for Intervention ProcedureS) training. By the next council meeting, Anderson presented the council with a draft ordinance pertaining to Alcoholic Beverages, which she wanted the council to peruse for its next meeting. She also presented a copy to town attorney Ed Wood, who made some minor language changes and brought a revised draft to the council meeting on April 27, where Anderson was again on the agenda to discuss the ordinance.

"Because underage drinking is such a problem in this county, compared to the rest of the counties, the (Prevention) Coalition felt that it was something that needed to be addressed," said Anderson. The most recent draft ordinance brings a couple of changes to the current alcohol regulations, including mandatory TIPS training. As the ordinance is currently written, "all licensees and all managers and supervisory personnel and non-supervisory personnel shall participate in and complete (TIPS)... within three months of obtaining the license or accepting employment." And all "non-supervisory employees" would be required to take a refresher TIPS course every six months for the duration of their employment at the business.

The draft ordinance also extends the number of violations that could result in the revocation of a liquor license from two to three. "We thought it was a more reasonable approach for the owners of a business," said Anderson. Business owners aren't so sure. "They give you something before they take something away," said Dan Abernathy, owner of Rock Rabbit. "It is what it is." As for the TIPS training itself, Anderson sees it as a positive for businesses, customers and the community at large. "(TIPS) covers a couple of things in addition to selling underage," said Anderson. "It also helps servers identify those that've had too much. It teaches them to short-pour them or cut them off. "It's sort of a win-win situation. They can be doing a better job about protecting our community, and they can also be making a little more money from the skills that they learn."

Business owners support the program, but aren't enthusiastic about it as a mandatory policy. "I think the TIPS training is a good thing," said Charlie Golden, owner of the Cowboy Bar. "We've always abided by it anyway. The only thing it looks like to me is that they're just trying to make more paperwork." "I'm behind taking it," echoed Abernathy. "Unfortunately, we can't be left to just do it on our own. We have to have a law or rule, and that's what sucks. "Every bar owner should do it anyway. We don't need an ordinance to do it." Despite these sentiments, the Town Council has verbalized its support of the potential ordinance, and the Prevention Coalition is paving the way. Robena Downie, who's a prevention specialist at High Country Counseling as well as assisting in grant acquisitions for the coalition, will be a certified TIPS trainer by the end of May. This will provide a local resource for businesses, since owners and employees have had to travel out of town for training in the past.

"It seems to me to be a need in the community," said Downie. "It's a valuable program, in relation to safe use of alcohol. And in certain places, where they've made (TIPS) universal, rates of DUIs have dropped quite a bit. "So I think it's a public safety issue and a health issue."