



RPS FACT SHEET  
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## Social Host Ordinance: Managing the Environment with Policy

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The 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) reports that a majority (53.4%) of current alcohol users aged 12 to 20 drank at someone else's home the last time they used alcohol. Further, more than 40% of those reporting any alcohol use in the past 30 days report receiving alcohol from an adult.

A well written Social Host Ordinance, supported by law enforcement, can strengthen a comprehensive prevention system by providing consistent reinforcement and validation of prevention activities.



## SOCIAL HOST ORDINANCE FAQ's

***What is a Social Host Ordinance?***

A social host ordinance is an environmental strategy that holds adults responsible for hosting, or in other words, knowingly providing a place for underage drinking to occur. A “Social Host” refers to an adult who knowingly allows underage drinking on property that he/she owns, leases, or otherwise “controls”.

***If kids are going to drink anyway, isn't it better to “take the keys” and provide them a safe environment?***

No! Drinking & driving is just one negative aspect of underage drinking. Alcohol is one of the most common contributors to criminal behavior among youth (US Department of Health and Human Services, 1992), and underage alcohol use can cause long-range harmful consequences, such as chronic alcohol addiction (Grant and Dawson, 1997).

***I thought providing alcohol to a minor was already illegal. How is a Social Host Ordinance different than what already exists?***

It is illegal for adults to provide alcohol to individuals under the age of 21. However, when law enforcement officials arrive on the scene of an underage drinking party, it is often difficult to determine who actually provided the alcohol. A Social Host Ordinance allows law enforcement to cite the individual who hosts or provides a setting for underage drinking to take place.

***Why does this ordinance target parties that occur on private residences and premises?***

Parties and gatherings on private property (including rented/leased condos, hotel/motel rooms, outbuildings, fields, etc.) have repeatedly been identified as the primary places in which youth drink alcohol. (*A Practical Guide to Preventing and Dispersing Underage Drinking Parties*, PIRE, 2005)

***What if I go away on vacation and my child hosts an underage drinking party?***

Under the proposed ordinance for Steamboat Springs, adults are not responsible for hosting the party if they are not at home and youth hold a drinking party without their knowledge. A teen or other person in control of the house could be cited for hosting the party in addition to possessing alcohol. This new law doesn't change existing civil liability—adults can be held liable for injuries or other consequences that occur regardless of whether they are present or not.

***What if I'm upstairs sleeping and my child sneaks alcohol into the house?***

Adults who knowingly allow underage alcohol use on their private property will be held responsible. If an adult is not aware that an underage person brought alcohol onto the property or if the underage person is concealing the alcohol, that adult will not be held responsible. Police officers must establish probable cause by determining that a person knew or should have known that underage drinking was occurring on the premises.



**“Holding youth solely accountable for underage drinking is like blaming fish for dying in a polluted stream.”**

*Laurie Leiber, Media Advocacy Manager; The Marin Institute*

The Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center [www.udetc.org](http://www.udetc.org) has created a Tool Kit to assist communities in their efforts to implement a Social Host Ordinance as a part of a comprehensive prevention system. Highlights from the tool kit suggest that communities address the following while working toward the implementation of a Social Host Ordinance:

1. Get a group that meets regularly from the start
2. Strategize
3. Network – Identify friends and foes
4. Fund your efforts
5. Organize the TO-DO list for volunteers/supporters
6. Communication and outreach
7. Inform and educate
8. Draft a resolution
9. Communicate with supporters and media
10. Follow through until the end

Understand that this type of policy work is not easy, this takes patience, perseverance and commitment. City and County governments will most likely hold many meetings before an actual vote on an ordinance will be taken. Prepare to have supporters and volunteers at all meetings to answer questions of council and/or commission members.

Additional resources:

[www.venturacountylimits.org](http://www.venturacountylimits.org)

[www.socialhost.org](http://www.socialhost.org)

[www.udetc.org](http://www.udetc.org)

[www.pire.org](http://www.pire.org)

