

Westbrook Police Department



Underage Drinking Enforcement Initiative

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Underage Drinking in Westbrook, Maine

In examining the occurrence and perceptions of underage drinking in Westbrook, Maine, we rely on two sources. First, we have in-house calls-for-service data which shows the type and number of calls related to underage drinking we handle each year. Second, we have data obtained from the Maine Office of Substance Abuse (OSA) through the Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Use Survey (MYDAUS). Combined, these two sources paint a realistic picture of the status and perception of underage drinking in our community. Below are some of the highlights from these data sources.

Using calls for service data, there does not seem to be a high number of alcohol related incidents involving minors, compared to our other calls.

Juvenile OUI/No Tolerance Law (CFS = Calls for Service)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Stops/CFS</u>	<u>Charges</u>
2004	4	2
2003	1	1
2002	1	1
2001	-	-

Typically, area juveniles have taken to holding large bonfire parties in remote portions of our city, including difficult to access spots. Additionally, a low number of juvenile OUI arrests does not necessarily signify a lack of activity, but may be an indicator that officers are tied up on “regular” calls and other duties and don’t have spare time for OUI enforcement activities. The specialized details that this grant would fund will allow officers to spend more time targeting these types of problems.

Possession of Alcohol by Minor

	<u>Stops/Calls</u>	<u># of Charges</u>
2004	3	14
2003	15	20
2002	8	9
2001	13	21

Small numbers of stops/calls with larger numbers of charges indicate that one call typically presents the officer with multiple subjects on which to take enforcement action, such as at woods parties or traffic stops with multiple offenders in one car. This is a serious red flag indicating the prevalence of group drinking situations among minors.

Selling Alcohol to Minor

2004 11 violations

Last year, for the first time in Westbrook, we partnered with the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office and examined retail liquor establishments in Westbrook. Using a minor undercover law enforcement reserve officer, we located eleven (11) retail liquor vendors in our city that sold to an underage subject that did not present any identification. This data reveals that there is easy access to liquor for minors in our community and details such as merchant surveillance will hopefully address this problem.

Furnishing to / Furnishing Place for Minors to Consume Alcohol

2004	1
2003	4
2002	3
2001	2

Again, because of the secretive nature of parties involving underage drinking, we would not expect to see large numbers of calls for these incidents. Rather, we know that minors are seeking secluded spots to consume alcohol and extra officers assigned to this type of details will undoubtedly aid in locating and reducing these types of situations.

The MYDAUS report for 2004 examined 1,153 students from grades 6 through 12 in Westbrook. The reports indicated that one of the top substances abused was alcohol. While some decrease in alcohol appeared between 2002 and 2004, binge drinking by minors and instances where students came to school intoxicated has risen. The MYDAUS survey indicated a 461-percent rise among junior high students for binge drinking and a 263-percent rise among high school students. Percentages of students who came to school intoxicated rose by 1.5-percent at the junior high school level and by 7.6-percent at the high school grade level.

One of the recommendations from the MYDAUS report was to identify and target interventions through the substance abuse counselors and student services staff within the schools. We feel that our proposed education and enforcement strategies will also serve to address the alcohol problems in our community and schools.

The Westbrook Police Department Underage Drinking Enforcement Initiative

The Westbrook Police Department applied for funding through the Maine Office of Substance Abuse for the purpose of conducting targeted underage drinking enforcement. In the summer of 2005, the Westbrook Police Department received \$5000.00 to fund officer overtime to conduct these details. In addition to the details, the department drafted a policy addressing a zero-tolerance policy on underage drinking, including guidelines on how to respond to large parties with minors consuming alcohol. Additionally, all members of the department received online training covering Maine liquor laws and techniques and tactics to use when responding to underage drinking incidents.

Enforcement Details:

Grant funding paid for overtime for officers to conduct a variety of details aimed at curbing underage drinking and underage access to alcohol. One type of detail is a two-officer team (one in plainclothes and one in uniform) driving an unmarked car, patrolling known "party spots" or locations where minors get together to consume alcohol. The rationale behind having one officer in plainclothes and one in uniform allows one officer (plainclothes) to get close to this type of activity while the other officer (uniformed) provides instant, recognizable identification in the event that law enforcement action is necessary.

Another type of detail is retail location surveillance where officers monitor stores that sell alcohol to make sure minors are not leaving with alcohol or soliciting patrons who are of legal drinking age to purchase alcohol for them. We have also conducted surveillance inside a local grocery store by sitting in their security room and monitoring the security cameras aimed on the liquor aisle. They had been experiencing a rash of alcohol shoplifting by minors.

Our most successful details have been large-scale efforts. In these details, 8-9 officers, some in plainclothes, some in uniform blanket the city in search of underage drinking parties. Officers in marked cars conduct traffic stops geared at locating minors who are either transporting alcohol or are operating under the influence. Officers in unmarked cars conduct surveillance at know party spots, retail locations that sell alcohol and check on the residences of juveniles that are on probation and have "no alcohol" conditions. A Juvenile Community Corrections Officer typically rides along with these officers to aid in locating and identifying these juveniles. The large-scale details have netted several large parties where alcohol was being provided to minors. When one such party is located, all officers converge on the home and each minor is tested using a portable breath testing device. Our local District Attorney's office has ruled that any juvenile who tests positive for alcohol can be summonsed for possession of alcohol by consumption. Parents are called for each minor present who has consumed alcohol. No one is allowed to drive away that has been drinking. The person in charge of the residence is summonsed or arrested for providing a place for minors to consume alcohol or for furnishing alcohol to a minor. Our experience has been that the courts are very tough on those who are providing a place for minors to consume alcohol.

Continuing Funding:

One unique aspect of our program is how we have been able to continue to fund it. Once a large number of juveniles began to get charged with underage drinking offenses, our Juvenile Community Corrections Officer (JCCO) approached the department with a proposal. Typically, a first-offense alcohol charge would net the juvenile a visit with the JCCO and a "fine" that typically went to a non-profit group, in addition to the potential of some community service. Our local JCCO suggested that the "fine" be placed into an account within the city for use in funding future underage drinking enforcement. This proposal was cleared through our city administration and a separate donations account was created to deposit any assessed fines. Additionally, the

Maine Office of Substance Abuse had additional monies and funded us for another year, based on our successes.

Additional Efforts:

In addition to enforcement efforts, the Westbrook Police Department partnered with the Westbrook Schools Substance Abuse program and created a series of evening summits aimed at identifying community concerns and calling community members to action regarding underage drinking problems. At the same time, Maine Governor John Baldacci rolled out a campaign aimed at educating people about the harm and effects of underage drinking. We held an initial summit meeting and had the Maine Attorney General as a keynote speaker. We also hosted panel consisting of a local physician, the Westbrook Chief of Police, the High School Assistant Principal and the Juvenile Assistant District Attorney to discuss how alcohol use among juveniles impacts their careers and daily workload. A follow-up summit identified issues and developed working teams to address these issues. Regular meetings continue and a hot-line to report underage drinking has been established.

Media:

Prior to starting the Underage Drinking Enforcement Details, a press release was distributed to all area media. This announced the program and described the enforcement efforts. In an effort to more effectively portray the problem and our efforts at resolution, we invited a television news crew to accompany us on a detail night. This went over extremely well and hopefully served as a warning to underage drinkers. The television station agreed to not show the faces of any persons who were underage. Information on the Underage Drinking Initiative and Summits were also placed on the police department website and city website.

Unlike many grant-funded programs, the Westbrook Police Department Underage Drinking Enforcement Initiative will hopefully continue to flourish once the initial funding has ceased. Through training, policy, partnerships with community members and a zero-tolerance stance, the Westbrook Police Department has created a unique, collaborative and self-perpetuating program aimed at addressing one of our community's biggest problems. For more information on the Westbrook Police Underage Drinking initiative, please contact Captain Thomas Roth at 207-854-0644 x406 or troth@westbrook.me.us.