

Sending a Shocking Message about Underage Drinking

Northern Virginia residents should prepare for a shock – a sticker shock, that is. In a regional campaign to prevent underage drinking, teams of youth and adults will place STOP stickers on multi-packs of beer, wine coolers and other alcohol products in stores throughout Northern Virginia, beginning October 10.

This Sticker Shock campaign is a youth-led initiative to educate adults who might be tempted to purchase alcohol legally and provide it to minors. The stickers tell adult shoppers to “Know the Law: It is illegal for any person 21 or older to purchase or provide alcohol to minors. Fines are up to \$2,500 or one year in jail.”

Why is Sticker Shock important here in Northern Virginia? Research shows that too many local teens are using alcohol, many times to get drunk. In a recent Alexandria survey, 17 percent of high school students who drank alcohol in the past month said that someone gave alcohol to them, and during focus groups in 2008, students reported that alcohol was “easy” to get. Often an older sibling, friend or stranger purchases beer or wine coolers for a minor. Sometimes it’s even parents who purchase alcohol products for their teens and turn a blind eye to parties in their homes where alcohol is available.

The penalties for providing alcoholic beverages to minors are significant, but the real damage is to our youth whose safety, health and bright futures are jeopardized when they drink. News reports of teens who are killed in horrific collisions after drinking alcohol provided by adults are a sobering reminder of the devastating consequences of teen drinking. In addition, research from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services confirms the serious damage that alcohol does to the brains and bodies of young people who are still developing. Youth who begin drinking at age 15 are five times more likely to report abuse of or dependence on alcohol than adults who first used alcohol at age 21.

Sticker Shock is designed to make adults think twice and turn away from purchasing alcohol for minors. Alexandria’s Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition, Arlington County’s R.E.A.D.Y. Coalition, and MADD of Northern Virginia are pleased to organize this first ever regional Sticker Shock campaign. Youth-adult teams will visit more than more than 100 stores in the City of Alexandria and Arlington, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun and Prince William counties. Working together, we hope to send shock waves through the region with the message that it’s simply not okay—and against the law—to purchase or give alcoholic beverages to underage youth.

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