

Appendix C - Social Host Liability Law

WHAT IS SOCIAL HOST LIABILITY LAW?

Social Host liability law refers to adults who knowingly or unknowingly host underage drinking parties on property that they own, lease or otherwise control. Through social host liability laws, adults can be held responsible for these parties, regardless of who furnishes the alcohol.

Teen parties are the primary setting for underage drinking for high school and college students – and a high consumption of alcohol and binge drinking. Ranches “where no one will know,” beach houses “where no one will care” and fields “where it just doesn’t matter” are all popular locations for teenage drinking parties. However, the most common setting for drinking among high school seniors is simply someone else’s home.

HOLDING ADULTS RESPONSIBLE

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) believes that underage drinking is not just a youth problem. It is also very much an adult problem. With adults who purchase alcohol for those under age 21; look the other way when teens talk about their drinking exploits; and host teenage drinking parties in their homes, many communities struggle to prevent underage drinking.

Holding adults responsible for underage drinking parties is a pro-active step for concerned communities, but can be difficult. Law enforcement officials are typically not able to determine who provided the alcohol when they arrive on the scene of a teenage drinking party. Therefore, laws that prohibit furnishing alcohol to youth under 21 years old can be hard to enforce.

Social host ordinances give communities a practical tool for holding adults accountable. These laws allow law enforcement to cite the individual who hosted the underage drinking party on their property. More than 150 cities or counties and 24 states, including Hawaii, have adopted social host ordinances.

BENEFITS OF EDUCATING COMMUNITIES ABOUT SOCIAL HOST

- Deterring adults and youth under age 21 from hosting parties where underage drinking is occurring
- Increasing the awareness of underage drinking parties and providing an incentive for hosts to be vigilant for underage consumption of alcohol
- Encouraging parents to take steps to prevent teenage drinking parties while they are away
- Holding underage youth partially accountable for underage drinking parties planned without the knowledge of their parents
- Recovering the costs for law enforcement of repeatedly responding to the same party site
- Officially establishing a community’s “zero-tolerance” policy for underage drinking.

TAKE ACTION

To more actively prevent underage drinking and help save more lives, MADD encourages communities to become familiar with social host ordinances to prevent underage drinking. Learn more about how your community can get involved with social host.

