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The Ventura County edition of *Prevention File* is published in cooperation with the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department, Alcohol and Drug Programs, Prevention, Intervention and Training Division. Please address all comments to Kathy Staples, Prevention, Intervention and Training Division, 801 Poinsettia Place, Ventura, CA 93001 or call 805/641-6314.
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CHANGING FOR THE BETTER IN VENTURA

WINDS OF CHANGE ARE MOVING ACROSS VENTURA COUNTY. New ways of thinking are being brought to bear on an old problem—the destructive effect of the use of alcohol and other drugs on individuals, families and the community.

From the process of locating and licensing alcohol outlets to the way communities deal with underage drinking, change is in the air.

"There has been an exceptional increase in public awareness of the alcohol-licensing process," says Ed Macias, district administrator of the state Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control. "People are becoming proactive. They're taking a real interest in what is going on in their neighborhoods."

Much of the change in outlook can be traced back to 1996 when the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, which is now part of the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department, adopted a strategic plan that would guide prevention strategies in coming years. The plan gave rise to a funding approach that supported grassroots problem identification and remediation: the Partners in Prevention initiative. This funding approach required the identification of community groups that were

interested in improving the health and safety of their neighborhoods. With county-supported training, technical assistance and a small measure of funding, these neighborhood and community-based groups became real agents of change.

From these modest beginnings, the prevention efforts in Ventura County have grown to include an impressive array of projects that span diverse ethnic, cultural and geographic communities across the county. What these efforts had in common was a focus on work at the community and neighborhood levels to seek changes in public policies that would alter the many factors that contribute to alcohol and other problems.

"We're pleased and proud of the work we've done," says Sharon Troll, president of the Westside Community Council in Ventura. The

Ventura CALIFORNIA



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council is typical of neighborhood groups serving as instruments of change. The Westside council, for example, has a public safety committee assigned to ensuring that licensing of alcohol outlets does not aggravate local problems. "We've kept several outlets from coming into areas that were already oversaturated with bars and liquor stores," says Troll. "It's been a matter of educating the community. We had to get the word out that this is not an anti-alcohol campaign but a question of land use and accountability and being good neighbors."

The La Colonia Coalition of Oxnard has worked to rezone streets, helped close down problematic outlets, surveyed their neighborhood residents, trained others in their community to be community activists, helped close down a drug house that operated in La Colonia for more than 20 years, sponsored an alcohol-free *Cinco de Mayo* celebration for years, instituted the Day Laborers Project, worked with local alcohol outlets and gotten a city-backed moratorium on all new outlets in their neighborhood...all of this has resulted in a major reduction in crime and their new status of being one of the safest communities in Oxnard.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Coalition has worked with the local Gay and Lesbian Community Center/Rainbow Alliance to adopt an AOD policy that has become a model around the state and nation, worked to improve the health and safety and reduce harassing behavior on high school campuses, developed a "Queer Party Planner" to address home parties and worked with local gay bars to institute policy changes. The coalition is instrumental in making the Ventura County PRIDE Festival a safe and healthy event.

The city of Oxnard has eliminated problems surrounding the city softball league by banning alcoholic beverages.

Keeping alcohol outlets from contributing to crime, underage drinking and deterioration of neighborhoods is one of the primary approaches adopted by community groups pursuing new pre-

vention strategies. Oxnard and Thousand Oaks in recent years have provided important new tools for these efforts—local ordinances that give townspeople and their city government a role in the process of locating and policing alcohol outlets. Through conditional-use permits, the city can demand that alcohol licensees comply with locally established requirements that protect the surrounding neighborhood.

Although the licensing responsibility remains with the state ABC department, the CUP process creates a second avenue for community input in siting new outlets. "We now have two avenues that can review the circumstances," says Ed Macias of ABC. "We're seeing people in the community develop new skills to negotiate and understand the business world. And the licensees now are taking this into consideration when they go into business. They know they need to keep the interests of their community in mind."

This year, the local-control issue moved to the front burner in the city of Ventura, which remains without a CUP ordinance. Michael English, a member of Ventura's Community Prevention Alliance, says neighborhood councils are raising their voices in a demand for change in a city that has a density of alcohol licenses that is six times the statewide average. "We're into an active media campaign on this issue," he says. "There's a big push in Ventura to develop tourist business. But what kind of business do we want to attract? Do we want to be a beach town where the norm is anything goes, or a place where families can come to spend the weekend?" The city ordinance that the alliance is proposing would make it much easier to deal with outlets known for requiring frequent police visits to deal with fights and other crime. "The city could go in and act quickly. We wouldn't have to go into the process of challenging their state license, and we would have the confidence that businesses would all play by the rules."

As grassroots efforts have grown up, larger agencies have also changed, by increasing their collaboration with these community efforts.

Thousand Oaks is demonstrating the power of

collaboration among community-based organizations, local government and state agencies to bring about change at problem outlets. Sheriff's Sgt. Stan Hibdon tells how officers had identified a Thousand Oaks nightspot that posed a concern for community members and that often figured in cases of violent assault and public drunkenness by its patrons. "When we warned them to clean up their act we were getting promises but no positive results," he says. "So we put together sort of a task force."

The offending bar suddenly had an unannounced visit by a small army of law enforcement officers, a representative of the city attorney's office, fire safety inspectors, business code officers, and agents of the ABC. "When the owner saw all that, he said he was ready to work with us," says Hibdon. "Involvement in the concerns of residents, and a more community-oriented policing approach, is really at the heart of this work."

Hibdon has taken this concept even further. As a founding member of the countywide Hospitality Oversight Committee, he works with alcohol- and drug-prevention agencies on a regular basis to focus on improving conditions at the most problematic bars and restaurants in the region. He believes such cooperative efforts can be a blueprint for the future.

When alcohol problems are being attacked on a variety of fronts, it can be difficult to measure their impact on public attitudes and behavior, but one Ventura County official is convinced that it's all coming together. Mike Klee sees the problem from the vantage point of his job as a probation officer, and in recent years he has seen a decline in the caseload of people convicted of driving while intoxicated.

"This was the time when the state reduced the blood alcohol limit from 0.10 to 0.08, so we were casting a wider net for drunk drivers," Klee says. "You'd expect the number of arrests to be going up but they actually have come down, and you can also see a downward trend in the proportion of traffic crashes that involve alcohol. So I have to conclude that there's been a major social

change in public attitudes about drinking and driving as a result of policy change."

Although the major cities in Ventura County have gotten a lot of attention (press) in dealing with alcohol- and other drug-related problems in smaller communities have also been using environmental strategies to address their own issues.

The community of Moorpark was the first and only city in Ventura County to enact a local ordinance to restrict alcohol advertising on billboards from youth-sensitive locations. Fillmore is developing a Fillmore Families Coalition that will work with the chamber of commerce and the city to change the way community festivals make alcohol available. California State University Channel Islands and the city of Camarillo are both actively investigating ways "create a culture of safety" for the brand spanking new college town. Santa Paula has long been actively seeking and implementing ways to make their community healthier and safer. They now have in place a CUP ordinance. In addition, Santa Paula has the added benefit of having Friday Night Live, which is a countywide youth development organization-activated group of youths to investigate and change conditions in a park setting.

Ojai—with a population of over 7,800—is the subject of a prevention effort just getting off the

ground, concerned in part with OxyContin and alcohol and drug use among youths.

Terry Germack, an Ojai resident who works as a counselor in an alcohol and drug recovery facility, and Ruth Cooper, of the Ojai Valley Youth Foundation, have asked the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department/Alcohol and Drug Programs for help in organizing a community coalition to work on changing the environment that surrounds alcohol and other drug use. "I think many people are too interested in a quick fix. If a kid gets in trouble with alcohol or drugs, they want to send him or her to treatment instead of looking at the bigger picture." Actively engaged in a collaborative effort to identify and then address those issues are community members, community-based organizations, local law enforcement, city government and the school district.

Winds of change are indeed moving across Ventura County. □

Editor's note: To learn about ways to get involved with prevention in your community, contact Kathy Staples, manager of the Prevention, Intervention and Training Division of the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department, at 805/641-6314 or at Kathleen.Staples@mail.co.ventura.ca.us.



TRAINING IS JUST THE BEGINNING



TRAINING THOSE WHO ARE IN THE BUSINESS OF SELLING AND SERVING ALCOHOL has long been touted as a tool of change for those working in the field of alcohol problem prevention. Selling to minors and serving obviously intoxicated patrons not only have possible safety consequences, but can create legal problems for businesses too. That's why responsible beverage sales and service (RBSS) training is seen by many as an essential component of prevention for any community. But does it work? Can it be improved? And does it have a long-lasting impact on a business?

The Institute for Public Strategies in Ventura County says, "Yes, yes and yes." Working diligently to review the curriculum and research on alcohol service training, IPS has modified traditional approaches to RBSS and incorporated it into a broader program aimed at reducing not only the problems experienced by patrons—like fights or driving under the influence—but reducing the legal and administrative risks for businesses as well. This "win-win" approach is beginning to confirm what critics of training have said for years: education alone does not change behavior.

"We are really looking at a critical balance," says Dan Hicks, senior preventionist at IPS, who leads a small team responsible for carrying out the innovative approach. "We are helping a business turn around problems while still turning a profit."

And that's what makes the approach in Ventura County so different in design and detail from other training programs. For years the goal of RBSS training has been to ensure that employees and managers of alcohol sales establishments knew the laws. The assumption was that with increased awareness would come increased compliance.

"The research simply does not bear that out," says Hicks, who argues that prevention systems

must be much more refined and rigorous to deliver what has been promised. "If you want to increase accountability, you have to protect the business bottom line."

In 2001, the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department funded IPS to carry out a problematic outlet remediation project. IPS set about the process of first identifying the retail settings where problems frequently occur; documenting the business practices that contribute to problems; and then defining business-friendly ways to approach management and achieve changes in operations that are, to follow the IPS mantra, "safe, legal and profitable."

But step one—identifying the places where problems frequently occur—can be difficult.

"For years people used RBSS training in a cumbersome way," says Kathy Staples, who manages all alcohol and other drug prevention programs for Ventura County. "Trainings would be offered to virtually any and all businesses, and the ones who had the most problems were never there. It was like refresher trainings for the best-run businesses, while others continued to cause problems for their neighbors and their patrons."

Those days are over in Ventura.

With funding from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, IPS developed a more efficient way of targeting businesses for RBSS training. The NHTSA (nit-za) project was implemented in late 2001 (see *Prevention File*, Ventura County, Vol. 17, No. 2, Spring 2003) and allowed IPS to enhance a "place of last drink" survey used to learn about the circumstances of drinking prior to DUI arrests.

John Clapp, PhD, from San Diego State University, was brought in to not only enhance the survey but also train counselors who administer the

FOR PROBLEM ALCOHOL OUTLETS in Ventura County

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survey at the DUI programs. Funding from Ventura County and NHTSA was used to create a computerized system for analyzing data from the survey. This gives preventionists more detailed data. It also helps create a “top ten” list of problem establishments in the county. From this list, IPS and a Hospitality Oversight Committee decide which establishments to target for risk assessments.

One tool that IPS can offer an establishment is RBSS training. But not all RBSS training is the same. In Ventura County, IPS is trying to create a training model that will have maximum impact and be tailored to unique needs of an identified business. In this way, RBSS training is not one-size-fits-all, but rather makes expectations clear for everyone, including local law enforcement.

“It’s RBSS with teeth,” said Hicks.

The teeth come primarily from follow-up observation that occurs after RBSS training takes place. Businesses soon understand that they are subject to ongoing monitoring for compliance with both ABC laws and responsible business practices. This ensures that the training is a beginning and not an end.

The Process

If an establishment shows up on the “top ten” list twice, it becomes a candidate for risk assessment. Several trained individuals make a series of site visits to look for potential problems. If the establishment does poorly on these independent assessments, IPS contacts the owner or manager.

“We do not single out bars; they single themselves out,” said Hicks.

IPS shares the results of the assessment with management. Hicks says the reaction from management is often predictable.

“First there is resistance, but after we manage to schedule an RBSS training it flows into an ‘I’m

sure I’ll learn something’ stance. That is followed by ‘I hope we are not embarrassed by our lack of knowledge,’ and then finally they come clean and we have a real dialogue about alcohol-related problems.” That dialogue takes place in a training session with staff and management attending together. This is essential because all the policies and training in the world won’t be effective if management does not support servers.

One example of management-supported policies is from RBSS training that recently took place at California Pizza Kitchen in Ventura. Servers were talking about the potential loss of tips if they cut off alcohol service to intoxicated customers. Management developed a policy on the spot: If a server cuts off service to a customer and loses a tip, California Pizza Kitchen will reimburse the server.

California Pizza Kitchen manager Sheila Funderburke supports the policy.

“We are not afraid to lose a sale in order to make the community safer,” she said.

Funderburke was also impressed with the training.

“It was very well organized and prepared. I really liked that they had trainers who were peers for my younger staff.”

Although California Pizza Kitchen was not on the ‘top ten’ list of problem alcohol outlets, Funderburke still felt the training was necessary.

“Most of my serving staff are young and may be intimidated asking for an ID,” said Funderburke. “We give them two weeks’ training but felt they may need extra confidence on serving alcohol.”

After the training, IPS is not finished. It conducts follow-up observations and meets with management again. Sometimes management is quite shocked to learn that they are assessed after RBSS training. Hicks and Marion Young, also with IPS,



feel that this important step sets their work apart from some traditional intervention methods.

"We make it clear that we want to see improvement; we are not going away," said Young.

Trainings

RBSS training is intense and thorough. The thoroughness comes from the training that RBSS trainers receive themselves. Young used every possible resource to put together a training manual that would exceed current standards and expectations.

"We drew on every resource available, including information from other countries," said Young.

Kim O'Neil is an alcohol and tobacco prevention project coordinator for the Ventura County Rainbow Alliance. She has gone through months of training and hopes to receive her certification soon. She says the curriculum is very in-depth and that the training manual is "very detailed, very educational. It has everything in it from state Alcoholic Beverage Control laws to

drink sizes; how to do things without offending people; how to offer alternatives . . . everything."

During RBSS training servers learn techniques on serving alcohol responsibly. One technique is a "red light" system. Servers are taught to let each other know when patrons approach a point when they should not be served (yellow light) and when they have reached the point when they should be cut off (red light). The system is about servers staying alert and maintaining good communication with both patrons and other servers.

Sarah Parish has been a bartender for ten months. She works at DJs, a small bar in East Ventura. She recently completed RBSS training.

"It was really informative. I learned a lot about getting IDs and I especially liked the 'red light' system."

When asked if she thought the training would have an

impact on the climate of the bar, Parish gave a definite "yes."

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"You think about things a lot more now," she said.

But Susan Morehouse is not quite as confident that RBSS training will have an impact at her bar. Morehouse has been a bartender for 23 years and spent the last 13 years serving drinks at Sans Souci in downtown Ventura. She thought the training was "very good."

"Every bartender should go to those types of trainings, not just once, but twice," said Morehouse.

But Morehouse is somewhat skeptical that the training will have an impact. "Maybe," she said hesitantly.

Hicks agrees that it is too early to measure results.

"There have been some changes," said Hicks. "But we really won't be able to say it is a success until we look at trends and consistent evidence of safe and legal operation."

Hicks points out that the focus thus far has not been on conducting RBSS training at bars. Hicks says the focus has been on building a lasting and solid system—developing a quality curriculum, training trainers, revising surveys and collecting data. Now that the system is in place, Hicks is confident that IPS is on the way to achieving its goals. □

Assessing Community Events

to Reduce Alcohol Problems

Communities that have been harmed by alcohol-related problems are increasingly denying alcohol businesses the ability to buy publicity or goodwill through high-profile sponsorships of organizations and events.

RESIDENTS OF THE CITY OF FILLMORE like to mark holidays with community festivals filled with music, games, food and drink. However, some inhabitants of the small city (population 17,000) have begun to feel that, when it comes to these events, there is too much emphasis on "drink."

In fact, the sponsor for nearly every festival in Fillmore is Anheuser Busch, and the company sells more Budweiser beer at the city's Fourth of July celebration than it does at any other Ventura County event all year.

"We're not saying that they shouldn't serve alcohol or that they necessarily need to change sponsors," said Jim Higgins, who has organized a group called the Fillmore Families Coalition to take a look at the issue. "We're just saying that we'd like to see the emphasis of these events change."

Besides the heavy drinking, Fillmore's festivals tend to be marked by:

- Insufficient ID checking.
- ID wristbands that can easily be removed and given to other festival goers.
- No identified, cordoned-off areas for drinking—thus, lots of people walking around with open alcoholic beverage containers.
- A shortage of non-alcoholic beverages for sale in main gathering areas.

The coalition has contacted city officials and the local sheriff's department and found both are interested in working with them toward change.

"This is not a 'we-they' kind of situation," Higgins said. "Everyone seems willing to work together, and I'm excited about that."

In the end, the coalition would like to see the city adopt alcoholic beverage service standards for all special events held in Fillmore.

The movement to keep community events safe has been growing in the county for several years and was helped along recently by the Institute for Public Strategies in Ventura. IPS, which is under contract with the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department, Alcohol and Drug Programs Division, is working with event coordinators and local business representatives to design events that are both enjoyable and safe. IPS sends trained volunteers to conduct assessments



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of alcohol sales and service at public events. The purpose of this effort is to

- Determine what kinds of policies and procedures vendors and event organizers use to prevent problems with alcohol.
- Gauge the nature and severity of any problems involving alcohol.
- Develop recommendations for ways in which the event or activities can be improved to reduce the risks of problems such as injuries, accidents, sales to minors and intoxication of patrons.

IPS offers event improvement plans to communities such as Fillmore that are interested in improving the safety of such events. Improvement is important because such events can be marked by underage drinking, vandalism and fights. Also, patrons who attend and drink too much often drive away under the influence, endangering themselves and others.

"The real hope is that cities and nonprofit organizations realize you don't have to sell lots of booze to have a successful event," said Dan Hicks, senior preventionist with IPS. "What you really need is good entertainment."

IPS said that the numbers show that safe events attract just as many, if not more, participants. In fact, alcohol-free events can draw quite a crowd. A local community college now hosts a *Cinco de Mayo* celebration where thousands attend throughout the day and no alcohol is allowed on the premises. Organizers report that overall

attendance has greatly increased since the event became alcohol-free.

On its Website, www.ipsventura.org, IPS offers a "Planning Guide for Ventura County Communities" for those groups that want to keep their special events festive and free of alcohol-related problems.

"With its sun-drenched climate, striking landscapes and dynamic population, Southern California offers a perfect setting for communities to celebrate their heritage and culture . . .", the guide reads. "But the organizers of all the events have at least one goal in common: they want participants to enjoy themselves and to be safe."

The guide also notes that many communities are becoming concerned about excessive alcohol advertising at special events and sponsorships by alcohol companies that come with strings attached.

"Communities that have been harmed by alcohol-related problems are increasingly denying alcohol businesses the ability to buy publicity or goodwill through high-profile sponsorships of organizations and events," the guide says.

Of course, some community events, such as the Ojai Wine Festival, actually celebrate alcohol. Those too can be conducted safely, according to IPS.

This year, IPS sent assessors to the wine festival, then compiled an assessment report and recommendations for improving next year's event. The assessors observed not just the safety of sales and service of alcohol at the event, but advertising and publicity, on-site promotions, sponsorship, and health and safety risks.

In the end, they determined that the festival was well organized but in need of a few improvements. They found that some of the alcohol servers were drinking while on the job and that the drink ticket arrangement allowed some ticket holders the chance to drink excessively. Also, the safety rules that were in place at the beginning of the day became lax toward the end of the day. IPS recommendations included the implementation of mandatory, 30-minute, same-day training for all servers; a better drink ticket setup; and volunteer security units to enforce rules throughout the day.

Event organizers don't have to follow the recommendations, but IPS has found some groups more than eager to improve safety. One of those groups is the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) Coalition, which holds a Ventura County Pride event each year.

In summer 2001, IPS volunteers assessed the event and IPS made several recommendations for improvement. All of those recommendations were followed this year; and the event, which attracted 1,000 participants, went smoothly.

"The group was very eager to have a safe event," said Kim O'Neil of the LGBT coalition. "The issues that had been brought to the Coalition were all addressed."

The Pride event is held in a fenced area on the beach, and one of the concerns from last year was that there were breaks in the temporary fence that allowed access by underage participants. This year, the fence was improved to prevent breaks.

Last year, participants were given ID wristbands that could easily be removed and potentially transferred to others who were underage. This year, nontransferable wristbands were used, and a special designated-driver wristband was also used to support those who planned to drive and chose not to drink.

In addition, this year all of the ID checkers for the event were trained in detecting false IDs, and all of the alcohol servers attended responsible beverage service training. A Breathalyzer was made available to participants who wanted to check their level of intoxication, and a Safe Ride Home program was offered.

In Fillmore, Jim Higgins would like to see the same type of measures adopted at community events that serve alcohol. His group has also started an annual alcohol-free community event to celebrate Mexican Independence Day—the real independence day on Sept. 14, not the alcohol-infused holiday that is celebrated on *Cinco de Mayo*.

"It's important for members of the community to get together and have a good time, but we need limits," Higgins said. "We're working on that, one step at a time." □