

County right to hold parents responsible for parties with underage drinking

MediaNews editorial

Article Launched: 10/14/2008 12:01:00 AM PDT

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY parties involving underage drinking just became more costly for parents. Contra Costa supervisors finally put some muscle into an ordinance that holds parents responsible for parties with underage drinking held at their residence, even if they are there or not.

Supervisors revised the ordinance so that parents in unincorporated parts of the county could be charged with a misdemeanor as well as receive up to six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine. The previous ordinance carried only a \$200 citation and no jail time. The new ordinance also defines a party as three people, rather than five.

Some may find that rather harsh and unfair. After all, what is a parent suppose to do if they are away on a trip and they trust their teenager to take care of the house, where instead, the teenager decides it's party time.

We understand events like this have been going on for years and even are glamorized on the movie screen, but that doesn't make it right.

Just look at the statistics. According to the 2007 California Healthy Kids Survey, 41 percent of high school juniors reported drinking in just the previous 30 days of the survey. A staggering 79 percent of Contra Costa juniors say it's "very easy" or "fairly easy" to get alcohol.

One Alhambra High School senior even came forward and admitted to MediaNews reporter Matthias Gafni that most high school parties in Martinez have alcohol, marijuana, Ecstasy and LSD. "Parents don't really know about them," he said. Maybe it's time Contra Costa parents get educated and clamp down on their teenagers.

Another good aspect of this ordinance is it could prevent deaths on the road. It's clear more accidents involve teens than any other age group; we cut down on cell phone use and text messaging, but an impaired teen is the worst driving scenario of all. This ordinance may not end all events, but if it can save some young lives, it's definitely worth putting on the books.

We support the Board of Supervisors for putting the pressure on parents who are lax in their oversight and for telling teenagers in Contra Costa County, the party is over.