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Underage Alcohol Sales, 90% Non-Compliance in Slidell
Interview Transcript April 2003

Freddy Drennan, Chief of Police, Slidell, Louisiana

Kathy Sharp from Hopenetworks

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Sharp: How big of a problem is underage drinking here in Slidell?

Drennan: Well, we don't think its epidemic proportions but we do think it is significant enough problem that we try very hard to make sure it doesn't occur.

Sharp: Ok – What kinds of problems do you have to deal with when underage kids are drinking?

Drennan: Well obviously the normal things of them getting out and drinking and driving and you know the fights that go on afterwards and the problems at home when they get home and they got problems there because they are coming home intoxicated. The biggest problem is that most of them wind up being binge drinkers and the don't know how to handle it, the can't handle it and it just leads to a multitude of problems

Sharp: Do you receive many complaints from the community about alcohol outlets selling to underage youth? Do you get a lot of calls?

Drennan: Well, I'd have to understand what you mean by a lot of calls. We do get complaints and when we get complaints we step out and do stings of some type of surveillances to determine whether it is a legitimate call that an outlet is serving alcoholic beverages or is selling alcoholic beverages to underage places and we do that on a pretty regular basis and try to keep them in check

Sharp: So say within a weeks period of time, time frame , or a month how many calls -- is there a ball park number?

Drennan: It really is kind of sporadic. Around spring break it will pick up. In the summer months it will pick up. Around the holiday season it will pick up. We get more reports or more instances of it reported to us.

Sharp: Tell us about the compliance checks that you have been doing and how often you actually do them

Drennan: Well a lot of that is based upon the number of on complaints we get. Usually they are complaint generated. Once that happens then you know the detective division is notified and they will go out and set up compliance checks and we will get an underage person to actually go in and purchase alcohol and of course that is all monitored and whenever possible videoed and the evidence is treated as evidence in a police case. The person that makes the sale to the underage person is depending on the circumstances usually they're just given a summons and a court date to come to court at which time they can either plead guilty or we go to trail then. If we have a chronic offender that is just over and over again then we will arrested them immediately and take them to jail and make them post bond.

Sharp: Last week only 2 of the 12 outlets you visited did not sell beer to underage youth. Is that what you've seen in the previous compliance checks?

Drennan: Pretty much yea.

Sharp: You have a very high success rate

Drennan : Pretty Much, yea

Sharp: The state ATC Office claims that over 90 percent compliance of alcohol outlets in St. Tammany does not sell to the underage youth. Why do you think that the numbers are so different – that the ATC finds so few non-compliant outlets?

Drennan: I have no idea. You'd have to talk to them.

Sharp: How difficult is it to enforce the underage drinking law in bars where underage youth are allowed to enter but not drink?

Drennan: It's a real problem. The problem that we have is they go in with someone over age over the legal age to drink and they'll buy the alcoholic beverage and they will go take it to a table where they are underage people and they will serve it to them. It really causes a real difficult, really difficult to enforce the law.

Sharp: Are you in favor of a Mandatory 21 law that prevents underage youth from entering bars where primarily alcohol is served.?

Drennan: Can we get it passed by this week-end?

Sharp: How much of your resources are devoted to dealing with the effects of underage drinking?

Drennan: I really can't answer that on a percentage basis. I hadn't thought about it in that arena. We do over a years time, over a calendar year time we do probably several hundred man hours on work on the setting up and following through and going to court on everything on the compliance stings we do.

Sharp: How much of your resources in general are devoted to dealing with alcohol related outcomes like drunk driving, bar room violence, drunken vagrancy and domestic violence?

Drennan: Here again it will be a wild guess. But I'm gonna say probably just off the top of my head at least 65 to 70 percent is involved in some kind of alcohol or narcotic use of some kind.

Sharp: Would you like to see a keg registration be passed. These kegs have registered numbers on them so you would be able to trace back these kegs like these kids having parties where their older brother might be able to go and get this keg and you would be able to trace this back to who was the person who got these kegs. Do you see a lot of this going on?

Drennan: Well sure we see keg parties. We hear of keg parties. I don't believe we have ever had a problem tracing them back to my knowledge at this point and time we can. Maybe the next time we will but usually we can find out where they came from. (We usually, 99 percent of the time, some of the kids are going to tell us how they got the keg and we back up on it that way.) The biggest thing we see is what I've already said they get a friend to get it, that's the biggest thing.

Drennan: Sure (I'd say more so instead of purchasing at the establishment. We had complaints this past weekend that a bar that is popular right now, The Asylum in old town, was having underage people. Parents were calling concerned that they heard things, cause kids hear things, parents hear things, teachers hear things, so forth and there was three 17 years olds that were arrested at the asylum for being and they did use a fake id. The bar did what they can say is their job. There is always a dispute if we think it was reasonable when they viewed the I.D. There were three people found to be underage and intoxicated in that bar with the use of a fake I.D.. With the onset of computers and digital scanners and everything that most every kid has access to in this day and time a fake I.D. is really not hard to come by at all..

Drennan: Well yea the hologram is there. That is true. You get in a dark bar room setting standing under dim lights and you walk up and throw it out there and look at it you know the hologram is not really that clear and apparent. Obviously it is there for a reason, that's the reason, but you have to remember the setting that you are in a lot of the times.

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