

## **Communities Work Together to Deny Underage Youth Access to Alcoholic Beverages**

In a statewide effort April 1-30, law enforcement, prevention specialists and other community members will coordinate activities aimed at limiting access to alcohol by young people under age 21. The increased enforcement and public education blitz will promote a safe prom season and end to the school year through existing collaborative efforts.

The campaign – called “Out of Their Hands” ([www.outoftheirhands.com](http://www.outoftheirhands.com)) – will emphasize that it is against the law for anyone under 21 to purchase, possess or consume alcoholic beverages. News conferences and media events will be held throughout South Carolina on April 1 to announce these efforts.

It’s the time of year when high schools hold proms, parent’s host graduation parties, and students in college as well as high school participate in spring break celebrations throughout our state. Sadly, some of our young people – who are our family members and friends – will not live to see the end of the school year. So the goal of ‘Out of Their Hands’ is zero fatalities during the spring!” This coordinated statewide effort demonstrates that South Carolina is working together at the local level to make a difference. Our state has 16 Alcohol Enforcement Teams (AETs) within the 16 South Carolina Judicial Circuits. In 2007, the General Assembly provided funding for local underage drinking enforcement and education efforts. Those efforts have been highly successful because they involve local partners working together on local problems.

Nationally, more than 5,000 young people die each year after becoming victims in motor vehicle crashes, violent crimes, or alcohol poisoning. From 2006 to 2008, 158 South Carolinians died in alcohol-related traffic crashes involving an underage driver who had been drinking. Many more were injured. The numbers of young people involved either as crime victims or as offenders are staggering. In addition, the cost to society is tremendous. The Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation estimates that underage drinking costs South Carolina almost \$1.2 billion each year.

In the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted among high school students throughout South Carolina, 35% reported that they drink. When asked about the usual source of their alcohol, 7% obtained it by purchasing it at a store, 3% from a restaurant and 1% at a public event; 25% gave someone money to buy it for them; 37% had it given to them by someone; 8% took it; and 20% got it by some other means. Because youth obtain alcoholic beverages from different sources, several strategies will be deployed to help eliminate those opportunities for them to possess or consume alcohol.