

Coalition Corner



RhodeMap to Safety Helps URI Students Steer Clear of Alcohol Problems

RhodeMap to Safety is a new campaign launched by the University of Rhode Island to create a safe and healthy community for URI students and South County residents. Recently, Mark Wood, a psychology professor and Fran Cohen, Dean of Students who oversee this effort, sat down with us to explain what the campaign is about.

One year ago, Wood conducted a scientific poll of URI students about alcohol issues on campus. Remarkably, the survey showed that 8 out of 10 students stated that they would support greater enforcement of drinking and driving laws. This finding helped campus officials see the need for a new law enforcement and public awareness campaign to address alcohol problems among URI students.

The resulting campaign-RhodeMap to Safety-was launched this fall to great acclaim, including a strong editorial of support published in the student newspaper, *The Good Five-Cent Cigar*. URI's Common Ground project, funded by program and research grants from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, is the primary sponsor of the campaign.

Of particular interest to local residents is that Common Ground provided \$34,000 to the Narragansett Police Department to support extra police patrols designed to combat illegal drinking and driving. Importantly, the RhodeMap to Safety campaign has put students on notice that both Narragansett and URI are implementing more intensive enforcement measures to deter illegal underage drinking and alcohol-impaired driving.

The campaign also draws student attention to two Rhode Island laws. The first is the state's per se law, which makes it a crime to drive while having a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08% or higher. The second is the state's zero tolerance law, which makes it illegal for drivers under age 21-who are subject to the state's minimum drinking age law-to drive while having a BAC of .02% or higher. Student surveys have revealed that many URI students are unaware of these laws.

Last fall, Common Ground partnered with 21 bars and taverns and all three package stores in Narragansett to sign cooperative agreements to promote responsible alcohol beverage service. Town and university officials hailed this new RhodeMap to Safety program as a vital step in preventing sales of alcohol to minors and excessive consumption by bar and tavern customers.

The Cooperating Tavern Program calls on bar and tavern owners to train and work with their employees to follow responsible beverage service practices, including ID checks, confiscation of fake IDs, and refusing sales to customers who might become intoxicated. The Cooperating Package Store Program focuses on preventing illegal sales to customers under age 21 as well as adult purchases of alcohol for minors.

All South County residents should applaud URI for reaching and working effectively with local community officials and business owners to deal with this complex problem and recognize the Coalition's Common Ground subcommittee who is working with the University to research and implement environmental strategies in Narragansett.

In addition to these environmental initiatives in the community, there is a robust and comprehensive prevention effort on campus led by Dan Graney, Director of Substance Abuse Prevention Services. To learn more about how URI has gained a national leadership role in substance abuse prevention, you can hear Dan and others at the next Coalition meeting, Tuesday, March 21 at 7:00pm in the Town Hall.

For more information about the Narragansett-URI Coalition, please e-mail or call Jim Hurton, Communications Subcommittee Chairperson at jhurton@narragansettri.com, 783-7121 or Paula Santos, Coalition Coordinator at pmsantos@uri.edu, 874-2583.

Please visit our web site at www.uri.edu/alcohol/coalition.

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