



## **The Underage Drinking Prevention and Social Marketing Project**

*Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws through a Statewide Marketing Campaign*

### **UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE**

Easy access to alcohol, irresponsible marketing practices, limited resources to enforce the minimum age 21 drinking laws, lack of youth education, and adults who condone underage drinking as a “rite of passage,” all contribute to alcohol being the #1 drug of choice among youth in WV (EUDL 2007).

- **Underage drinking is the #1 youth health crisis. It kills more young people annually than all other illicit drugs combined (NIAAA 2006).**
- Adults who had first used alcohol before age 15 are **five times as likely to be dependent on alcohol** as adults who first used at age 21 or older. In fact, more than one-quarter (2.0 million) of alcohol-dependent adults, age 21 or older, first used alcohol before age 14. About eighty percent, 5.5 million, first used before they were age 18. Ninety-five percent, 6.6 million, first used before age 21 (SAMHSA 2005).
- Underage alcohol use contributes to problems including: risk-taking, traumatic injury and death due to motor vehicle crashes and drowning, homicide and suicide, risk of overdose and death by alcohol poisoning, early-onset alcohol abuse and dependence, high-risk sexual behavior, fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and other alcohol-related birth defects, family violence, other types of interpersonal violence, such as physical and sexual assault, and involvement in criminal activities (NIAAA 1997).

### **UNDERAGE DRINKING CONSEQUENCES**

- In 2005, 49 traffic fatalities in WV occurred involving drivers aged 16-20. Among these young drivers, 24% had a BAC level of .08 or higher (NHTSA 2006).
- Underage drinking cost the citizens of West Virginia \$350 million in 2005. These costs include medical care, work loss, and pain and suffering associated with the multiple problems resulting from the use of alcohol by youth. This translates to a cost of \$2,122 per year for each youth in the State (UDETC and PIRE 2006).

### **IS UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE A PROBLEM IN WV?**

**YES** - Underage drinking is widespread in West Virginia. Approximately 72,000 underage youth in West Virginia drink each year. In 2005, according to self-reports by West Virginian students in grades 9-12:

- 74% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 31% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 42% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasion in the past 30 days.
- 29% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (i.e. binge drinking) in the past 30 days.
- 6% had at least one drink of alcohol on school property in the past 30 days. (UDETC and PIRE 2006).