

Program attempts to deter drinking

Daniel West
Oregon Daily Emerald

"Under 21? Warning: police officer may be posing as an employee," is becoming a familiar message posted in 7-Elevens, Safeways and 110 other retailers throughout Eugene. These signs are a part of a recent program introduced in Oregon called "Cops in Shops."

The program is designed to deter minors from purchasing alcohol using a false or altered identification and hopes to stop individuals over the age 21 from buying alcohol for minors.

This is accomplished by placing two off-duty, undercover officers in stores. One will pose as an employee, while the second is placed outside the establishment to apprehend adults. This program is sponsored by the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC), the Eugene Police Department (EPD) and a Century Council Coalition.

"The Program has been very successful. In 1993, there were 148 arrests and citations in the first 12 weeks of the program," Pat Tharpe of The Century Council said.

These minors and individuals arrested by the police may face serious monetary fines, violations and a lot of wasted time.

Minors who attempt to purchase with false or altered identification may be additionally fined for misrepresentation and forgery. These crimes carry a minimum of one year in jail.

The program is being enforced throughout Eugene but there has been a concentration of "Cops in Shops" around the campus area.

"At times campus has been more complicated. There are more parties especially on Fridays, Saturdays and sometimes Wednesdays," Pete O'Rourke, OLCC regional manager, said. We try to get all the stores where kids buy more alcohol and some of these areas are located around the University. I have seen people who've read the (warning) signs and walked away. This is a good indication that it works. It serves as a deterrence factor."

Regardless of the warning signs some students remain skeptical of the "Cops in Shops" program. "This doesn't stop me from buying alcohol

because the probability of getting caught is nothing. I've ignored it (the under-age drinking law) for several years. Why start now?" Greg Chilina, a 20-year-old University student, said.

There are also some adults who overlook this program.

"I don't really ever think about it," Sean Hart, a 23-year-old University student, said. "I should be concerned but I'm not. It would be a bummer to be fined a thousand dollars. But, students are going to find another way to buy."

However, some students believe this program deters them from purchasing alcohol.

"If I were going to be fined or lose my license I wouldn't try to purchase alcohol. I believe this will stop students from buying alcohol," Leesa Foster, a 19-year-old University student, said.

Because the programs yielded high numbers, there has been talk of placing OLCC officers in bars. They would aid in the confiscation of false identification from minors entering those establishments.

United States Department of Health and Human Services' surveys showed a need for a program to curb minors' consumption of alcohol. These surveys stated that alcohol is the major cause of all fatal and non-fatal crashes involving teen-aged drivers. Almost two-thirds of students who drink buy their own beverages.

Programs to deter minors from drinking are in effect in other cities such as Champaign, Illinois; Amarillo, Texas and Omaha, Nebraska.

"The problem of underage drinking became so big that retailers were taking all the responsibility," Tharpe said. "The retailers stated that they needed help with the problem. This program seemed to be great because it worked hand and hand with police and retailers. Also, this placed all the responsibility on the minor or adult attempting to purchase."

"I hope that OLCC takes this program over," said O'Rourke. "I want them to make this a permanent part of their administration. Also, I would like every store in Oregon to participate in this program. If we can help to deter minors from purchasing alcohol, we can prevent all accidents that involve minors and drunkenness."

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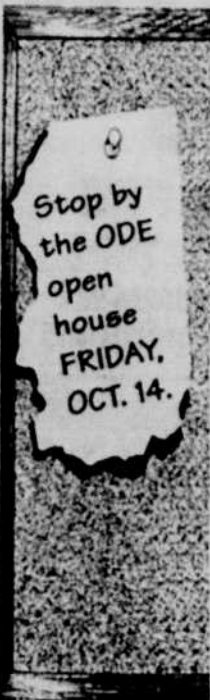
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