



Photo illustration Adelle Lennox and Adam Amato Emerald

Licenses

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It was the second week of my summer at home, and Colonial Liquors was the first California store at which I had tried the \$100 fake ID. I argued for a good two minutes before he smirked and said, "Let's just have the police come and decide."

My eyes glazed over. I realized the convincing counterfeit included my real license number and permanent address. I had my photo taken at the time of purchase, so it was my real mug.

"I'll call them now," he said tapping the wall phone.

I hesitated and then bolted, almost crying because I still had 11 months until my 21st birthday.

"What am I going to do my junior year in Oregon without an ID?" I wondered.

Now a junior, I turned 21 a little more than a week ago. It took the California police and district attorney several months to successfully investigate the false identification. By "investigate," I mean I received a frantic call from my mom early winter term, spouting "I told you so" as she read aloud a letter from the investigating police officer requesting that I call and explain the falsified card. I cried and asked: "Will I go to jail? Will I pay a fine?"

According to the letter I received from the California district attorney two days before my birthday, I could have received either a six-month jail sentence or a \$1,000 fine — or both. But because I didn't have a prior record, the charges were dropped (or maybe it's because I described how and where I got the card, a suspenseful story I can't share here for fear that my best police sources will never return my calls again).

However, after talking to State of Oregon and Eugene officials, I realized that the more stringent liquor-control-freak state just north of laid-back California would not have handled it the same way.

I was lucky, according to Oregon Driver and Motor Vehicle spokesman David House, to have been "caught" in California, given that Oregon has more strict and more immediate penalties for fake ID users. Had my ID been taken at an Oregon liquor store and investigated by local authorities, the DMV would have contacted the department in my home state, and I would have lost my California driving privileges for up to a year.

However, when the DMV receives IDs from bars and liquor stores directly — without police reports — House said they're shredded without investigation. Coincidentally, Eugene Police Department Sgt. Rex Barrong said bars and liquor stores

should send confiscated IDs to EPD for immediate investigation.

"We don't get a lot of IDs sent here," he said. "And if it's because local establishments are sending them to other organizations. They shouldn't be doing that."

Although confiscators are not required to send cards to the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, OLCC spokesman Ken Palke said they are recommended to do so to advance their investigations of fake ID mills.

"We have busted rings in all areas of Oregon," he said. "But a lot of times, confiscated IDs have no good information to investigate."

When establishments do send an ID to EPD, officers investigate information on the card — if viable — and charge the individual with forgery of a government document, a serious felony. Barrong said the charge, which automatically applies to all fabricated or altered IDs, is a hefty risk to take for getting into bars and liquor stores before legal drinking age.

"If you have a felony on your record, and you have high expectations for your future, you better think about it twice because that silly decision in college could come up in a background investigation one day," he said. "Unfortunately, a lot of young people don't think that far ahead."

As a California-native at a college with a truly weak nightlife for underage party-goers, I wasn't thinking that far ahead either. In fact, the majority of my 20-year-old friends who have fake IDs don't worry about getting caught, while others are on a constant mission to find 21-year-olds with comparable appearances.

Unfortunately, the accuracy of my license information brought me down in the end. Had investigators concluded I was using the ID for anything other than alcohol, including fraud or identity theft, I'm sure I wouldn't have been let off so easy. I know the student arrested for manufacturing fake IDs in Walton Complex in 1997 didn't get off so easy.

According to Department of Public Safety Associate Director Tom Hicks, a DPS officer in 1997 saw the student through a ground-floor residence hall room window, tampering with an out-of-state license template on his computer. Although the majority of DPS cases have involved possession and not manufacturing of fake IDs, Hicks reminds students that both misrepresenting age and forging government documents are serious crimes in Oregon.

"We discourage this kind of activity," he added sternly.

I say to think twice in Oregon, even if I didn't in California.

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