

# Allowing underage drinking creates huge liability for adults

By Lauren Folino  
Published: June 11, 2009

[Reader Comments \(6\)](#)  
[Printer-friendly version](#)

Underage drinking is a big problem on the Vineyard, public safety officials say. And often adults contribute to the problem, by providing alcohol to minors or providing a venue for underage kids to drink.

That was the message attorney Mark J. Hoover delivered to a group that included parents and police officers Monday night at a program the Youth Task Force (YTF) hosted on the Social Host Law, which focuses on the civil liability for adults who furnish alcohol to minors.

And, adults who confiscate car keys and create so-called safe havens for minors to drink in the mistaken belief that they can somehow protect young people not only face criminal prosecution but also expose themselves to civil liability that can have significant financial consequences.

Mr. Hoover, a Martha's Vineyard Regional High School alumnus and member of the Boston law firm Campbell, Campbell, Edwards and Conroy, emphasized the lengthy and costly trials that result from violations of the Social Host Liability statute. He said that civil suits can take up to five years and may result in millions of dollars awarded in damages. A typical homeowners insurance policy only covers about \$500,000, he said.

Mr. Hoover gave an example of a civil case in which nearly \$8.7 million was awarded to the plaintiffs of a Social Host Liability lawsuit.

"District attorneys offices and police departments are taking a no-tolerance policy to underage drinking," he said. "I think district attorneys are more and more willing to bring the hammer down because of how often these things happen."

West Tisbury police chief Beth Toomey said she has had conversations with concerned parents about underage drinking on the Island, and that the focus of preventing teens from drinking must be just as great year-round as it is in the summertime. "Any time we can communicate about this is always better," she said. "There's been some more parties lately and I think we focus on prom and graduation, but it would be great if we concentrated more on year-round."

Offentimes kids throw parties at their parents' homes when parents are out of town or off Island. If an adult comes home to drunk teenagers, whether or not they knew the teens were drinking on their premises, they will still be held liable under the Social Host Law if the underage kids leave the home and get into an accident.

One parent asked Mr. Hoover if she is responsible for getting kids home safely if she returns home to her child hosting a party. "Yes," he answered. "Call the parents, or the police."

West Tisbury police sergeant Dan Rossi said the police should be the next phone call if

SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING ON MARTHA'S VINEYARD?

Find it! on Martha's Vineyard

Click here to start!!!

**Bank At Your Leisure**

Martha's Vineyard SAVINGS BANK

CONVENIENCE

Edgartown • Chilmark • Oak Bluffs • Vineyard Haven • West Tisbury

Online Banking with Bill Pay • 24-hour Telephone Banking  
7 Convenient Locations • 10 ATM's

FDIC 508.627.4266 • www.mvbank.com

**COLONICS**

HOLISTIC SPA annex

(508) 338-4744 appointments  
4 Main St, Vineyard Haven  
NEW LOCATION OF DR. RONI DETOX SPA

21 POUNDS  
21 DAYS

MARTHA'S VINEYARD  
**BuyerAgents**

REAL ESTATE SPECIALISTS

REAL ESTATE SERVICES FOR BUYERS, EXCLUSIVELY

WWW.MVBUYERAGENTS.COM  
TEL: 508-627-5177

**In Chilmark**

Twelve rooms, three full and one half-bath, 3,400 square feet, built in 1990, on four acres, bordering conservation land. Very private.

kids' parents are not home. "If you come home and there's a party and drunk kids, do you want to deal with that liability?" he asked. "Call the police. Let us deal with it."

Click for more information



| [MORE](#)

[SINGLE PAGE VIEW](#) 1 | 2 [NEXT >](#)

[Martha's Vineyard Homes](#)

Beautiful Martha's Vineyard Homes for Sale and Rent, 300+ Listings

[Oak Bluffs Rentals](#)

Luxury & Affordable Vineyard Rental Martha's Vineyard Vacations

**Reader Comments**

6 comments · [Post your own](#) · Sort: [Newest First](#) - [Oldest First](#)

Does the Social Host Law apply to adults who are entertaining other adults in their home? One doesn't always know if his or her guests were drinking before they arrived at a get-together, and many adults conceal their inebriation very well. As a homeowner, I just want to understand the liabilities.

[Click here to report this post](#)

Posted by Curious on Thursday, 6/11/09 @ 12:48am

To respond to Curious, the Social Host Liability Law applies only to underage drinkers. For more information you can visit [socialhostliability.org](http://socialhostliability.org).

[Click here to report this post](#)

The Safe Homes Pledge is a program designed to provide parents with the assurances that other parents are taking proper precautions to keep youth safe while in their home. This involves monitoring activities and preventing substance use by youth that are in their home. Parents are encouraged to become part of this network and make a commitment to themselves and other parents in the community to provide a safety net for youth. The Safe Homes Network focuses on parents with children in grades 6-12, but welcomes all parents to join the network and become familiar with the commitment. For more information or to join the network, please call Jamie or Theresa of the Youth Task Force at 508-696-5304 or email [ytf.jamie@yahoo.com](mailto:ytf.jamie@yahoo.com).

Posted by Youth Task Force on Thursday, 6/11/09 @ 1:01pm

This is the stupidest thing I have ever read. HIGH SCHOOL KIDS are going to drink no matter what, and not allowing them to drink in a safe haven where there is adult supervision just means they will go somewhere else.

[Click here to report this post](#)

Posted by cody on Friday, 6/12/09 @ 7:59am

It is confusing when a young adult can vote and join the armed forces at 18 and yet can not drink. If we expect them to act like adults then we must have adult legal expectations, or have a blanket age of 21 for voting, drinking and joining up! As most adults know, there is an enormous difference in maturity between 18 and 21. At 18 they are not emotionally adults.

[Click here to report this post](#)

Posted by Lesli on Friday, 6/12/09 @ 11:59am

Unfortunately this is a complicated subject. I was lucky enough to grow up in a household where freedom and independence could be earned through responsibility. I also know how easy it is to acquire alcohol as an underage kid on the vineyard, especially during the summer time. Now I'm out of college and have a sister going into high school. It pains me to think that her and her friends may start experimenting with alcohol soon. On the other side, I've seen the extreme repercussions of sending an over sheltered child off to college. The college kids who end up being cared to the hospital with alcohol poisoning are almost always the ones who never had a beer before they left home. I'm not 100% opposed to supervised "parties", as long as there are no cars involved. I kind of relate it to getting a permit before a driver's license. Both are too dangerous to learn on your own, so it's an easier transition with adult supervision. Do you honestly want your child to have their first drink in some skanky bar in providence without knowing anything about how much is too much? A lot of those bars only require a college ID, and the cities aren't exactly a safe haven for an overintoxicated minor. Also, if we're going to crack down on underage drinking, there has to be an effort to give high school kids something to do. If kids are not going to go out to parties, what do we expect them to do with themselves? Realistically speaking, if you take away drinking and don't replace it with a healthy AND fun activity, they're going to find something else to get into. Suggestion: more school dances. what is more intoxicating than teenage hormones?

[Click here to report this post](#)

Posted by John on Monday, 6/15/09 @ 11:27am

I am a prevention specialist and am currently writing my third book, "Secrets of Great Teens." My workshop, Adolescence 911: The Antidote is You! is offered to parents, teachers and members of the community who are committed to the wellness of teens. I will be on-island at the end of this month. Please let me know if you would like to meet to discuss my workshop. Thank you. Dayle Lynn Pomerantz, Executive Director, ParentTeach.

[Click here to report this post](#)

Posted by Dayle Lynn Pomerantz on Sunday, 7/19/09 @ 5:43pm

**Leave your comment:**

Name:  Email:   
Town:  Phone: *(including area code)*   
Comments:

All fields are required. **Your email address and phone number will not be posted online.**

If you believe a comment violates our [terms of use](#), please notify us by clicking on the