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## State launches Halloween crackdown on underage drinking

by Bay City News

California's Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control is ramping up its statewide efforts to reduce the number of minors injured or killed in crashes or incidents involving alcohol this Halloween.

ABC's efforts include deploying agents in communities where there have traditionally been large celebrations, such as towns with universities, agency spokesman John Carr said.

The efforts are especially important since Halloween is on a Friday this year, according to Jim Kooler, administrator of California Friday Night Live Partnership.

The partnership is a youth development organization that started as an effort to reduce the number of deaths and injuries involving drugs or alcohol among teen motorists.

"The colleges are the hot spot, being on a Friday," Kooler said.

For teens, a college party is "like a light bulb with moths collecting around it," he said.

Efforts also include employing other organizations to get the word out about being safe this Halloween and employing minors as decoys to reduce the number of businesses and adults selling alcohol to minors.

Decoys used by the ABC are youth who are under the direct supervision of investigators and who attempt to purchase alcohol from businesses or who ask patrons to buy them alcohol. When asking an adult for alcohol, the minor somehow indicates they are underage.

If an adult buys alcohol for a minor, investigators will arrest and cite them. The penalty for providing alcohol to a minor is a minimum of \$1,000 and 24 hours of community service.

The agency is employing 130 to 135 agents across the state as part of the enforcement effort and will be visiting as many communities as possible.

According to a recent ABC report to the California Legislature, there were 3,704 citations and arrests of minors for offenses related to alcohol in fiscal year 2012-2013, the most recent data available. The same year, 180 youth ages 16 to 19 died in motor vehicle crashes related to

alcohol.

"We're encouraging people to have a plan" by having a non-drinking person drive others home, Carr said.

Members of the industry watchdog group Alcohol Justice remembered those who died last Friday. Kids with face paint and a giant coffin went to Circle K and Mi Pueblo Food Center stores in San Rafael to ask the stores to stop selling "alcopops," fizzing alcoholic beverages.

Alcohol Justice says the drinks are targeted to underage drinkers, especially young women, and the group wants to ban the sale of them.

"Too many young Californians under the age of 21 are killed or injured in alcohol-related crashes and incidents and we're hoping enforcement efforts will prevent tragedies from occurring," ABC director Tim Gorsuch said.

Other organizations and agencies involved with ABC's efforts to keep kids safe include Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the California Highway Patrol and Saving Lives Drug and Alcohol Coalition.

"By getting the message out now, we are hoping for increased compliance," Gorsuch said.