

FAST FACTS

CONTROLLED PARTY DISPERSAL

Controlled Party Dispersal is a law enforcement strategy to address illegal underage drinking parties. The strategy was developed in 1993 in Montgomery County, Maryland, by police officers who were frustrated with the negative consequences that were occurring at large-scale underage drinking parties within their communities. (1) The basic premise of Controlled Party Dispersal is to dedicate appropriate available resources to contain party participants, identify adult providers, and effectively control the release of party attendees. (2) The strategy involves initial containment of party participants and identification of offenders, including the supplier of alcohol to underage youth. It also includes educating the host and attendees regarding the negative consequences of underage drinking, and then a safe and systematic release of the youth to their parents and/or legal guardians in an effort to reduce injury and minimize liability to all involved parties.

THE GOAL

The goal is to reduce the availability of alcohol to underage youth from social sources such as parents, older siblings, and friends. In addition, the strategy focuses on identifying the adult provider and holding them legally accountable for the illegal supply of alcohol to underage youth. The operation further focuses on utilizing the dispersal operation to educate and discourage future participation of both adults in hosting and youth from attending underage drinking parties.

WHY THE OPERATIONS ARE BENEFICIAL TO COMMUNITIES

Typically, kids do not drink alone. Where kids drink and who they drink with matters. Teen parties constitute one of the highest risk settings for youth alcohol problems. (3) Researchers have found that peer pressure from one's own age group to engage in activities they may or may not want to engage in is a major factor in the development of risk-taking behaviors, e.g. alcohol, drug and tobacco use. (4) Youth who drink at parties are at high risk for binge drinking and associated alcohol problems. These include, but are not limited to, academic failure, sexual assault, and drunk driving. (5) By reducing youth access to alcohol at parties, communities can reduce the negative consequences associated with underage drinking, thereby creating a safer and healthier environment for their youth.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR OPERATIONS

While controlled party dispersal operations are an effective enforcement strategy, that does not mean that they will be easy to implement in your community. You may face strong opposition from parents, law enforcement agencies, politicians, and the community at large because they are not familiar with the protocols of the program. In addition, they can be very labor intensive. Many departments may not have the resources to adequately

address the number and size of the parties. You must lay a strong foundation for the use of controlled party dispersal operations in your community. The community coalition must work to increase resources and actively support use of this strategy within the community. It is also imperative that communities utilize “best practice protocols” to ensure that the dispersal operations are being conducted legally, thereby allowing successful prosecution of those found in violation of the law.

HELPFUL TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

Given the potential size of underage drinking parties and the few officers that are available to respond, the approach must be tactical, safe, and planned in order for dispersal execution to be successful. (6) To ensure the success of your program, you must thoroughly address the following issues before initiating controlled party dispersal operations.

- Training is essential. Follow “best practice” procedures/protocols for conducting dispersal operations to include, but not limited to, training law enforcement and community volunteers on these protocols.
- Work with community leaders to garner support for controlled party dispersal operations.
- Work with legislators and municipal attorneys to ensure that the community has the necessary laws and ordinances in place to deal with individuals who illegally provide alcohol to underage youth.
 - Some ordinances to consider include social host laws, nuisance abatement, keg registration, and park closing hours.
- Work with prosecutors and courts to ensure prosecution of those found to be in violation of the laws.
- Work to provide additional resources for law enforcement agencies to engage in controlled party dispersal operations.
- Work with the media to enhance and reinforce community norms and expectations about underage drinking.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

The APRC website has resources that provide detailed explanations of appropriate protocols for conducting controlled party dispersals. In addition, the APRC may be able to provide in-person training on Controlled Party Dispersal Operations for your coalitions and law enforcement communities.

- A Practical Guide to Preventing and Dispersing Underage Drinking Parties – Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation – In support of OJJDP – Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program. 2000, 2005, & 2011

REFERENCES

1. PIRE 2000
2. A Practical Guide to Preventing and Dispersing Underage Drinking Parties – Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation – In support of OJJDP – Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program. 2000, 2005, & 2011 Page 14
3. Regulatory Strategies for Preventing Youth Access to Alcohol (PIRE), 1999
4. Lewis & Lewis 1984
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6. A Practical Guide to Preventing and Dispersing Underage Drinking Parties – Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation – In support of OJJDP – Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program. 2000, 2005, & 2011 Page 14