

Officer Bill Morrison  
Presentation to the Walt Whitman PTSA, January 17, 2012

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*Officer Morrison works in Special Operations for the Montgomery County Police Department, and provided the following information to parents. These notes are a summary of his presentation.*

*Accompanying Officer Morrison was Meg Baker from Keeping it Safe, the under-21 alcohol prevention coalition. [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/kis](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/kis)*

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### **Facts and Stats in Montgomery County**

- Between Thanksgiving and the week after New Year's, his unit handled 23 underage drinking parties, cited 294 students for underage drinking and helped 17 students with alcohol poisoning—10 of whom were from Whitman, B-CC, Walter Johnson and Churchill High School. All of these incidents involved “good kids making poor decisions.”
- He has recently worked with Channel 9's Andrea McCarren for her soon-to-air, prime-time special examining the crisis of underage drinking, designed to help educate kids and their parents about the consequences.
- 40% of people taken to shock trauma centers after accidents were high on marijuana. (Many teens think they can drive safely under the influence of pot, or that they are safer driving after smoking than after drinking.)
- 60% of students have fake IDs.

### **The Law**

#### About parties: student information

If the police show up at a party (after receiving calls from neighbors or even other students), they will knock on the door and ask permission to enter. If they can determine there is a medical emergency in the house, they can forcefully enter.

If there is alcohol found, each underage student in attendance can be charged as “a minor in possession.” A citation is a civil offense. Cited students under 18 can receive a \$500 fine for the first offense, along with community service. They may

also be required to get alcohol screening and education, and be levied additional fines, as well.

A second offense can bring a \$1000 fine, and the student may then be determined to have a drinking problem. The MVA can be notified of the potential problem and the student may have to appear before the medical advisory board to prove there is no drinking problem in order to retain his/her license.

Those 18-20 years of age can receive a \$250 fine, community service and alcohol screening and education.

If a student goes to the hospital for alcohol poisoning, the hospital is required to contact police. But the police at that time are less interested in citing the student than in uncovering information about other students who may be in a similar situation and gathering information to prevent others from getting sick or dying.

#### About parties: parent information

If you host a party at which alcohol is present, you can be charged with:  
1) furnishing alcohol to minors and 2) violation of the adult responsibility law. This can bring a \$2500 fine for the first child and a \$5,000 fine for each additional one. These are criminal violations. In addition, you could be sued in civil court.

If you are not present at your home when a party occurs, you cannot be charged criminally, but could be sued for liability. In addition, most insurance companies will not cover any damage to or theft from your home which occurred during a party.

#### Drinking and Driving

No one under 21 can have any alcohol in his/her body while driving. If pulled over, an underage drinker can be arrested and lose his license if there is an odor of alcohol. That is all the evidence needed.

#### At Home, In Your House

Parents are legally allowed to provide alcohol to their underage children in their home. However, those children cannot leave the home with any alcohol in their bodies or they can face violations and arrest.

#### **What They Are Seeing**

Officer Morrison reported some alarming and disturbing trends:

- Blood alcohol concentrations are becoming alarmingly high. Last year, for example, a teenager died who had an alcohol level of .70. Another young

- woman died in a car accident with a blood alcohol level of .38. In most states, a Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) of .10% is considered legally drunk. A BAC of .37%-.40% or higher can cause death.
- Underage students are “attention drinking” -- drinking so much that their behavior will draw attention. Such excessive levels of alcohol in the body often lead to the need for hospitalization.
  - On the other hand, kids aren’t taking care of each other, and instead will ignore, hide, or otherwise leave behind friends who have gotten sick from drinking, in order to avoid being caught, getting in trouble, or having to leave a party.
  - Sexual assaults: 9 out of 10 kids think sex is consensual if the girl is passed out.
  - Drunk driving is no longer as big a problem as it once was. Students are assigning designated drivers. The growing problem instead is massive consumption that leads to alcohol poisoning, sexual assaults and other drugs.
  - Test kits: You can purchase one at CVS to test your child for drug use. Don’t bother with a urine test; instead, send 5 strands of hair in for testing to receive even more accurate results.
  - Tailgating: Students are filling water bottles and Slurpee cups with clear alcohol to bring to the parking lot before or after games. Drinking on school property (for minors or adults) can result in a \$500 fine and a one-year mandatory suspension of your driver’s license (or delay in getting one), and an alcohol violation on your record, which insurance companies will see.
  - Where do kids get alcohol? The police recently addressed a problem in DC where a liquor store near the Maryland line was routinely selling alcohol to minors. Other sources are parents’ alcohol at home, and purchases by older siblings/friends.

### **What Can Parents Do?**

- Ask questions of your kids: where are you going, and with whom, etc.?
- Contact the parents who are hosting parties to confirm that they will be there, and that they will not be allowing alcohol. Offer your help to chaperone or bring over food, etc.
- If you host a party, make yourself obvious. Be at the door to make sure nothing gets brought in and they see you are there and around. Don’t just collect keys and disappear. Frequently refill food and non-alcoholic drinks during the party, so you have reason to pass through the party area.
- When your own kids come home from being out, meet them at the door. Kiss them and hug them so you can tell if they have been drinking or doing drugs. Let them know that you will be checking on them.
- Check that there is only water in their water bottles.
- Ask to see the contents of their wallets—check for fake IDs.
- Regarding Beach Week: Try to convince your child NOT to go/look at alternative things to do, including the school-sponsored trip to Disney World.

If they do go, consider making them come home after three days (when kids start to get bored of the beach and more problems seem to occur). Also, some parents may consider spending a few days at the beach, while their seniors are there.

For additional Information, please visit the following websites:

[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/kis](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/kis)

[safenet@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:safenet@montgomerycountymd.gov)