

# Social Host Ordinance

One step in deterring underage drinking in Meeker County

## Frequently Asked Questions

**A Social Host Ordinance holds individuals (social hosts) criminally responsible for hosting or allowing an event on private or public property where persons under age 21 possess or consume alcohol, regardless of who supplies the alcohol to the minors.**

This ordinance applies to situations in which:

- ❖ The social host **knows or reasonably should know** that alcohol is being possessed or consumed by underage persons at their residence or premises or at any event they are hosting on public or private property.
- ❖ The social host fails to take reasonable steps to prevent possession or consumption by the underage person or persons.

Under this ordinance, the host does not have to be present at the party, event, or gathering to be criminally responsible.

**Alcohol is the number one drug of choice for youth, and alcohol-related incidents are a leading cause of death among teenagers.** Alcohol use can lead to traffic accidents, fatalities and property loss, assaults, accidental overdose, and suicides. Research shows people who begin drinking alcohol as adolescents are more likely to become chemically dependent.

The Minnesota Student Survey indicates that the vast majority of alcohol consumed by youth is provided by their friends, parents, other family members, or at parties; rather than the youth buying it themselves or taking it. Currently, in Meeker County, individuals may be charged with furnishing alcohol to a minor and anyone under 21 can be charged with possession or consumption of alcohol, but officers are often unable to identify who provided the alcohol. This ordinance will allow law enforcement to charge the individual who hosts the event.

**Adults will not be criminally responsible if they did not know about the underage drinking.** However, if the host knew about the party or gathering, knew that underage drinking was occurring and did nothing to prevent it, he/she will be criminally responsible.

A host is not criminally responsible if a youth sneaks alcohol that is available for adults at an event or gathering without the host's knowledge.

The ordinance does not apply to conduct solely between an underage person and his or her parents while present in the parent's household and does not apply to legally protected religious observances.

**Violation of the ordinance will be a misdemeanor subject to a maximum penalty of 90 days in jail and/or a \$1,000 fine.** If the ordinance is passed in Meeker County, it will be enforced by the Meeker County Sheriff's Department outside of individual city limits. If passed by individual cities within the county, it will be enforced by both the city and the county.

The Litchfield Area Rural Partners in Prevention is currently working with local agencies to educate the public about the importance of a Social Host Ordinance in our area.

If you would like to get involved or have further questions, please contact Wendy Foley, Public Health Educator, at 320-693-5380 or [wendy.foley@co.meeker.mn.us](mailto:wendy.foley@co.meeker.mn.us)

What is a Social Host ordinance?

Why has the ordinance been proposed?

Will adults be held responsible if they are unaware of underage drinking in their home or on their property?

What are the penalties? How will the ordinance be enforced?