

Working with the Media

When new data become available for your community on www.sumn.org, turn it into a news event. Are substance use and related consequences getting worse in your community? Are trends improving? Do new data show rates for your community to be much higher or much lower than the state average? Do you want to tell the community what your organization is doing about it? Do you want to let the community know what they can do about it?

Sharing data with your community via local media outlets can be a win-win situation: the local newspaper, radio station or television station gets a story, and you get a large audience. Consider sending a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, or sending a public service announcement (PSA) to a local radio station. Create a press release and alert all local media outlets.

You may wish to write a brief article about your findings, or announce a community event during which time data will be shared. In addition to local media, look to outlets within organizations, associations and local businesses such as newsletters, listservs and bulletin boards.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires radio and TV stations to donate a certain amount of airtime to serve the public and the community—including health and safety announcements. Most public radio and TV stations have a community calendar too, where you can announce upcoming events. Check local newspapers for community calendars also.

Unfortunately, PSAs are not usually tracked by stations and you likely won't hear back if they do choose to announce yours. TV and radio stations get hundreds of requests for PSAs. Some tips to keep in mind:

- Shorter is better—most accept 30 second spots, by try to keep yours to 15 seconds.
- Choose a station that fits with your target audience
- Be creative!
- You can submit an MP3 produced PSA to radio stations

If you are submitting a PSA via mail, fax or email, put "Public Service Announcement" at the top of the

page. Be sure to include the name, phone, email, and fax of the contact person as well as the dates you would like the PSA to be aired. Put the title of your news item in bold letters, as you would a press release, followed by a short, concise explanation of what you want aired. End the PSA with ###.

Create, promote, and watch your own public service announcements using the free website www.brickfish.com.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Christine M. Krueger, Director of Communications

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 27, 2008

CONTACT:

Nathan Bowie, Nathan.bowie@state.mn.us; 651-201-7571

Lisa Husom, Lisa.Husom@state.mn.us; 651-201-7570

IMPAIRED DRIVING: A REAL NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

ST. PAUL — Drinking and driving is totally not ghoulish, according to the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS). DPS 2005–2007 data for Halloween party weekends reports seven of the 17 traffic deaths were alcohol-related and impaired driving accounted for 18 serious injuries. During this same period, 1,543 motorists were arrested for DWI. DPS asks for your support to educate your listeners with these safety messages during the Halloween weekend.

Public Service Announcements:

Don't get "monster-smashed" and drive this Halloween. If you plan on drinking, make sure someone in your party is dressed as a designated driver. A life-saving message from [STATION] and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

Still looking for that perfect Halloween costume? Your best move is to go as a sober, designated driver — and give your friends a safe ride home. A life-saving message from [STATION] and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

This Halloween, avoid a haunted hayride — to jail. If you plan on putting back a few witches' brews, get a designated driver or a cab to treat you to a safe ride home. A life-saving message from [STATION] and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

Drinking and driving is totally not ghoulish on Halloween. Scare up a cab or a designated driver to get you to your next spooky spot. A life-saving message from [STATION] and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

###

Press Releases

A press release provides the media with the basic information they need to write a news story: the who, what, where, when, why and how. The press release can then be mailed, faxed or emailed to your local media outlets.

General Template for a Press Release

For Immediate Release

[Month, Day, Year]

Contact: [Name]

Phone: [Number]

HEADLINE IN ALL CAPS, 80 CHARACTERS OR LESS

Briefly summarize your news items. Keep it to one or two complete sentences.

[YOUR CITY/COUNTY], Minn. — Put the most important information in the first paragraph—the one thing you want the reader to take away from this press release. Make it attention-grabbing.

Answer the who, what, when, why and how of your news story. Keep paragraphs and sentences short. Avoid acronyms, and don't assume the reader is familiar with your organization, project or the issue.

"Include quotes from key staff or subject matter experts." Include the person's name, title and organization.

Provide more details about the news you have to tell. For example, describe how new data differ from historical trends. If use of a new substance is on the rise, provide some background information on the substance. Be sure your tone is neutral and objective. Avoid the use of "I," "we" and "you" outside of a direct quotation.

Include a sentence or two about your organization.

###

DECEMBER DWI MOBILIZATION: UNDERAGE DRINKING NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December [DATE], 2008

CONTACT:

PHONE:

UNDERAGE DRINKING AND DRIVING ENFORCEMENT PART OF DECEMBER DWI EFFORT

[RECOMMENDATION: PARTNER WITH SURROUNDING AREA AGENCIES OR SAFE COMMUNITY COALITIONS ON NEWS RELEASES TO AVOID DUPLICATION WHEN ISSUING TO MEDIA]

[YOUR CITY/COUNTY], Minn. — The holiday season coupled with impaired driving makes for one of the deadliest periods on Minnesota roads. Throughout December [YOUR AGENCY(IES)] are conducting a DWI enforcement crackdown, with special efforts focused on young motorists, including those under the legal drinking age.

The state's "Not a Drop" law says driving minors cited for any amount of alcohol use will lose their license from 30 to 180 days, and face up to a \$700 fine and 90 days in jail. Minors will lose their license until age 18 if they are arrested for DWI or involved in an impaired driving crash or crime. Trying to purchase alcohol with a fake ID can result in a loss of driving privileges for at least 90 days. There were 7,509 "Not a Drop" violations issued to drivers under age 21 during 2004–2006.

Each year in Minnesota, motorists under age 21 represented around one in 10 of the total DWI arrests. During 2005–2007, there were 10,988 underage DWI arrests. Teens are also represented in alcohol-related crashes. During 2005–2007, 16-17 year old drinking teen drivers were involved in crashes that resulted in 13 deaths and 37 serious injuries. During that same period, 1,447 16-17 year olds were arrested for DWI.

[YOUR AGENCIES] say adults who provide alcohol to underage drinkers will be held responsible and face serious criminal and legal consequences.

"If an adult provides alcohol to an underage person and that person is killed or injured or if they kill or injure someone else, the adult can be charged with a felony and face time in prison," says [SPOKESPERSON]. Adults who provide alcohol are also subject to civil liability in cases of injury, property damage or death. Civil liability is not covered by most insurance.

Young adults continue to be the primary violators of impaired driving. From 2005 to 2007, more than [INSERT PERCENT-AGE] percent of DWIs in [COUNTY(IES) NAMES] were committed by motorists in their early 20s.

In Minnesota, 505,152 motorists have a DWI — one in eight with a driver's record. A DWI can cost up to \$20,000 when factoring in increased insurance cost rates, legal and other fees.

[YOUR AGENCY] is encouraging the use of "Designated Driver Gift Certificates" — which can be sent via email at <http://www.minnesotasafeandsober.org/>. The certificates allow friends to offer a safe and sober ride for a night out, and call for the recipient to return the favor.

Drunk Driving. Over the Limit. Under Arrest.

For Immediate Release:
December 19, 2007

Contact: Randy Wanke (651) 582-1145
Christine Dufour (651) 582-8720

**STATE RELEASES 2007
MINNESOTA STUDENT SURVEY DATA**

Roseville, MN – An interagency team from the Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, Human Services and Public Safety today released results from the 2007 Minnesota Student Survey, which is a voluntary and anonymous survey taken by Minnesota students in grades six, nine and twelve.

“Teaching our young people about health and safety begins at home,” said Education Commissioner Alice Seagren. “It’s our hope that the results of the student survey provide parents and educators with some additional insights into important issues and challenges facing Minnesota students.”

The 2007 Student Survey was administered during the spring of 2007. All Minnesota public school districts were invited to participate and 309 of the state’s 338 districts chose to do so.

The voluntary survey, which is administered every three years, asks students questions about tobacco, alcohol and other drug use and attitudes, sexual behaviors, dietary behaviors, physical activity and unintentional injuries, violence and other topics.

Before the survey is administered, parents are provided with an opportunity to view the survey and determine their child’s participation. Students could also decline to take the survey, or if they took the survey, they could skip questions or stop taking the survey at any point. The surveys are anonymous and answers cannot be traced back to an individual student.

The survey was taken by approximately 81 percent of sixth-graders, 76 percent of ninth-graders and 58 percent of twelfth-graders. Overall participation across the three grades was 72 percent.

View the Survey Data Tables online. These results should not be compared to results from previous years because the districts taking part in the survey vary from year to year and should be reviewed with the understanding that the data is self-reported by the students.

The state also released Initial Trend Data, which only includes districts that have participated in the survey every year since 1992.

“Overall, Minnesota’s students appear to be healthier and safer. Yet, given recent high-profile tragedies involving alcohol abuse among young people, we should all be concerned about the large percentage of students who use and abuse alcohol,” said Minnesota Health Commissioner Dr. Sanne Magnan. “Students, parents, schools and community members need to work together to identify positive ways to prevent young people from abusing alcohol and other drugs.”

“The statewide decline in methamphetamine use among students is very encouraging news and consistent with other meth-related trends,” said Human Services Commissioner Cal Ludeman. “Although the meth problem has not disappeared, the magnitude of the problem has declined and Minnesotans should be relieved by that.”

Survey trends included:

- Students reporting that they feel safe at school remained high at 93 percent of 12th graders and 91.2 percent of 9th-graders
- 12th-graders reporting that they were physically active on five or more days in the past week increased from 36.9 percent in 2004 to 41.4 percent in 2007
- Students reporting across all grades that they always used seatbelts increased between 2004 and 2007 -- from 58.6 percent to 66.4 percent for 6th-graders; from 50.5 percent to 58.2 percent for 9th-graders and from 57.3 percent to 61.7 percent for 12th-graders.
- 12th-graders reporting that they used alcohol in the past year held steady at 62.7 percent, compared to 62.8 percent in 2004. 9th-graders reporting that they used alcohol dropped to 37.4 percent, down from 42.6 percent in 2004
- 12th-graders reporting that they binge drink (five or more drinks in a row during the past 2 weeks) remained steady at about 30 percent. 9th-graders reporting that they binge drink dropped from 15.3 percent to 12.6 percent
- 12th-graders reporting that they drove a motor vehicle after using alcohol or drugs one or more times in the past year dropped to 24.1 percent in 2007, compared to 28 percent in 2004
- 12th-graders reporting they ride with friends after they have been using alcohol or drugs dropped to 36.8 percent in 2007, compared to 39.2 percent in 2004
- 12th-graders reporting that they plan on going to college increased to 85.7 percent, compared to 82.8 percent in 2004
- Students reporting that they have smoked declined across all grades
- 12th-graders reporting that they used marijuana in the past year increased to 30.7 percent, compared to 27.1 percent in 2004
- 9th and 12th-graders reporting that they used methamphetamine in the past year dropped between 2004 and 2007 -- from 4.9 percent to 2.2 percent for 12th-graders and from 4.2 percent to 1.5 percent for 9th-graders

Additional trend data can be found at: <http://www.education.state.mn.us/mde/index.html> “Traffic deaths are the leading killer of teenagers and this is largely due to the fact they still buckle up least often compared to any other age group,” said Michael Campion, commissioner of the Department of Public Safety. “While the survey indicates teen belt use is increasing, it’s clear education and enforcement efforts need to focus on increasing seat belt use to ensure needless traffic tragedies are prevented.”

Note: The Department of Education has provided districts with their survey results and encourages members of the media to contact local district officials for that data.

###

Letter to an Editor

Another means of disseminating local data you find on www.sumn.org is by writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. It may help to keep the following tips in mind:

- **Address your letter correctly.** Be sure you have the correct address and salutation on your letter. If sending an email, you may have to fill out an on-line form rather than sending it to a specific person.
- **Address only one issue per letter.** Such a letter will have more impact than one covering multiple issues. If you have professional expertise on the issue you are addressing, be sure to describe it.
- **Ask for something specific.** Propose a particular action or response to your reader. What do you think needs to be done about the issue?
- **Keep it short.** To make sure your letter is read rather than skimmed, make your points quickly and concisely.
- **Make it personal.** Tie the issue to your personal expertise or experience, or to a current event or news item. Use your own words.
- **Be courteous.** Rudeness will always alienate your reader.

Keep these tips in mind as well if you are writing a letter to a local policy maker. In addition, 1) write to policy makers for whom you can vote. Elected officials are most interested in your opinions if you are their constituent. Occasionally, it may be useful to write to committee chairs, even if they do not represent your district. 2) When appropriate, express your appreciation. Policy makers appreciate an occasional “well done” and it signals that you are paying attention. 3) Include your return address on your letter. By including your address in the letter, all readers will know that you are a constituent and will know what address to send a response to. 4) Follow-up letters can have a larger impact than the initial communication. Thank the policy maker for taking a correct stand, or ask questions about any unsatisfactory answers.

Adapted from: www.ucsusa.org/ssi/resources/writing-an-effective-letter.html

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

[DATE]

Letters to the Editor

[Name of newspaper]

Address

Fax

Dear Editor:

As a physician, I've seen firsthand the harm secondhand smoke can cause. Plain and simple, this is a major health threat to us all. Every year, up to 65,000 Americans die from secondhand smoke. And it's not just people who live with a smoker who are at risk. Even occasional exposure to secondhand smoke, in the office or in a restaurant, for example, can be fatal.

That's because secondhand smoke contains dangerous toxins like benzene, ammonia, formaldehyde and carbon monoxide. The poisons in secondhand smoke cause cancer, heart disease, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and many other life-threatening diseases. Every year, secondhand smoke is responsible for approximately 26,000 new cases of asthma alone.

There is no "safe" amount of secondhand smoke. The only way to truly protect the health of our loved ones is through smoke-free work places, homes, restaurants and other public places. Secondhand smoke isn't just an annoyance, it's a danger to the health of us all.

Sincerely,

Dr. XXX XXXXX

Source: Physician Advocacy Network's 2002 "Tools for Eliminating Secondhand Smoke in Your Community" created by the Minnesota Institute of Public Health.