

Dear Editor,

Periodically, through the CDC's Drug Free Communities Grant, businesses selling alcohol undergo compliance checks to ensure adherence to age verification protocols. These checks involve verifying IDs to prevent sales to minors, who must be at least 21 years old to purchase /consume alcohol in Wisconsin. Businesses found in violation receive education and potential fines, as permitted by Wisconsin state statute, with law enforcement overseeing the process. I would like to recognize and appreciate the 19 retailers in the City of La Crosse who successfully passed compliance checks performed in the past two weeks.

In Wisconsin, where alcohol culture runs deep, addressing underage drinking early is crucial. It's noteworthy that many La Crosse County youths avoid alcohol, with **81% of high schoolers not drinking alcohol**, per the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. This highlights the need for community-wide efforts to lower underage drinking.

Preventing underage drinking is vital. It's not just about following rules but protecting our young generation. Underage drinking can lead to serious health and safety risks, including alcohol dependence and risky behaviors like drunk driving.

Rigorous ID checks at alcohol venues are essential. Establishments should enforce strict ID policies to comply with legal age requirements. Community members can also help by talking with youth about alcohol risks and promoting healthy choices.

As summer events approach, it's vital for parents, educators, and leaders to create alcohol-free spaces. Offering alternative activities can deter youth from drinking.

I thank responsible retailers for prioritizing youth safety. Let's keep working together to promote responsible alcohol habits and provide the support and guidance for our youth to make healthy choices.

Sincerely,
Kaycee Irwin
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La Crosse County Health Department