

Good Job Fortuna PD Community Comment: February 26, 2015 Mike Goldby

Alcohol is a part of our society, our culture, our history. But lax attitudes towards alcohol contribute to significant problems; personal problems and community problems. As far as misery and destruction, alcohol clearly causes more than all of the other drugs. We all know drinking and driving is a horrible combination. We witnessed that again recently on Highway 36 and my heart goes out to the families trying to make sense of that tragedy.

So, with that in mind, I would like to commend the Fortuna Police Department for their recent Decoy Operation. A number of local law enforcement departments do this each year and it is a proven way to decrease underage drinking.

In a minor decoy operation, police supervise minors who attempt to purchase alcohol at local businesses that have liquor licenses. In Fortuna, they went to seven businesses and 6 turned the decoy away. Only one business sold to the minor.

That clerk now faces a fine of \$250 and 24 hours of community service. The ABC (Alcohol Beverage Control) will take some administrative action against the Market, could be anywhere from a fine up to suspension of the liquor license.

These operations have been conducted across the United States since the 1980's and have repeatedly been supported by California Courts as a legal and valid law enforcement tool.

Just to be clear, this is not a sting and not entrapment. A sting is intended to catch people. These decoy operations are only judging compliance with the law. Entrapment is when the target is enticed to commit a crime. With a decoy operation, the store has a choice to follow the law or not.

The ABC regs require that the minors clearly look like a minor, clearly under the age of 21. They carry their own ID and present it if asked. Or they carry no ID and state that they have no ID on them. They are required to truthfully answer any questions about their age. Male decoys cannot have facial hair and female decoys cannot wear makeup.

If a sale is made, the decoy exits the store and promptly returns with a law enforcement officer to identify the person who made the sale. They are then cited for selling alcohol to an underage person.

When decoys operations first started, a 50% violation rate was common. Today, the rate is well under 10%. Most stores want to be responsible and want to uphold this important law.

An article on this is posted on the Lost Coast Outpost and about half of the comments were against it, calling it a waste of tax money or asking if this is really a law enforcement priority. The national Highway Traffic Safety Administration has nationwide statistics that show people under the age of 21 have twice the rate of alcohol involved traffic fatalities as compared to adults.

Take a look at the local arrests listed in the Bookings section of the Lost Coast Outpost. Look at how many DUI and drunk in Public arrests there are each day. It is safe to assume that most of those people have an alcohol problem and it safe to assume that most of those started drinking at a young age.

It is very important that we support law enforcement in these efforts and look at what we the community can do to address the problem of underage drinking.

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment