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Wobbly without alcohol

Special goggles help teach alcohol awareness to students

Wednesday, September 15, 2004

By Nancy Buczek
Staff writer

College students got a taste of what it's like to drive while drunk Tuesday without a drop of alcohol passing their lips.

Syracuse University's Substance Abuse Prevention and Health Enhancement office teamed up with other campus departments to put on a virtual-intoxication event at Hendricks Field in front of Lawrinson Hall.

Students donned special goggles that made them feel as though they had a blood-alcohol content of 0.15 - higher than the state's legal limit of .08. Then they drove golf carts through an obstacle course, tried to play catch with a small ball or walk a straight line.

Most said it was harder than they expected. ▼ From Our Advertiser

"My depth perception went really, really bad," said Mike Antypas, an SU sophomore from Pawtucket, R.I.

Most students wobbled as they walked and drove their golf carts over the small orange cones outlining their driving lanes.

Alcohol is the No. 1 drug used on campus, with marijuana following second, said Susan Scholl, SU's associate director of substance abuse prevention and health engagement.

"The intent is to help folks make the connection between alcohol consumption and blood-alcohol content," Scholl said. "We know from experience that students don't often make the connection between the brain and what happens when they're using alcohol, and other drugs for that matter."

This is the fourth year SU has sponsored the virtual-intoxication event for students at SU and the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Both campuses have inundated students with alcohol awareness messages since the semester started about two weeks ago.

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"The first week is probably the most important week," said Jim Heffernan, ESF's vice president for student affairs and educational services. "They are away from home. They have complete freedom."

First-year students are especially at risk when it comes to alcohol or drug use, Scholl said. "Frankly, students don't know their limits. They're still figuring that out," she said.

When a person drinks alcohol, the first part of the brain that the alcohol impairs is the part that dictates reasoning and judgment, Scholl said. People may think they can drive even though they have been consuming alcohol, or they may spend time with people they normally wouldn't - a risky behavior for women who could become sexual assault victims, Scholl said.

This is the second year that SU has required all first-year students to complete an online alcohol education course called "AlcoholEdu for College." Scholl said the program provides SU officials with data so they can determine trends in alcohol and drug consumption.


The number of alcohol referrals to SU's Office of Judicial Affairs increased 33 percent from fall 2002 to fall 2003, from 374 to 498, according to SU's Web site. The report states that the increase may be attributed to increased Syracuse Police Department patrols in the university neighborhood. Drug cases decreased from 77 in fall 2002 to 50 in fall 2003, according to the report.

SU is not alone in combating drug and alcohol use.

About 44 percent of college students binge drink, with binge drinking defined as men consuming five or more drinks in a row at least once in the past two weeks, and for women, drinking four or more drinks in a row at least once in the past two weeks, according to a 2002 Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study.

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