

Principal's Message • OPHS PFC Newsletter

November 2007

Over the last few weeks, several of our students have been caught at school in possession of illegal drugs and/or prescription medicines that did not belong to the student. The illegal drugs included marijuana and a variety of various prescription medicines that were either taken from their parents, presumably without their knowledge, or were bought from other students. I would like you to be aware of the growing abuse of prescription medicines in Oak Park and among teenagers nationwide. According to the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA), "The most dramatic increase in new non-medical use of prescription drugs is among 12 to 17 year-olds and 18 to 25 year-olds."

Prescription medicines are intended to treat specific medical conditions. For the millions of patients who use these medicines as prescribed they bring dramatic improvements in health and quality of life, but when abused or misused, many can have significant adverse effects that disrupt rather than improve lives. Increasing parent awareness of this abuse can help reverse this trend.

The first step is identifying some of the commonly abused prescription medicines. Although many of these medicines can be abused or misused, the three classes that are most commonly abused are:

- Opioids, which are most often prescribed to treat pain and are sometimes referred to as narcotics:
 - OxyContin™ (oxycodone), Darvon™ (propoxyphene),
 - Vicodin™ (hydrocodone), Dilaudid™ (hydromorphone),
 - Demerol™ (meperidine), Lomotil™ (diphenoxylate),
 - Morphine and Codeine.

- Central nervous system (CNS) depressants, which are used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders:
 - Barbiturates such as Mebaral™ (mephobarbital),
 - Nembutal™ (pentobarbital sodium); and Benzodiazepines
 - such as Valium™ (diazepam), Librium™ (chlordiazepoxide
 - hydrochloride), Xanax™ (alprazolam), Halcion™
 - (triazolam) and ProSom™ (estazolam).

- Stimulants, which are prescribed to treat the sleep disorder narcolepsy, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and obesity:

Dexedrine™ (dextroamphetamine), Ritalin™ (methylphenidate), and Meridia™ (sibutramine hydrochloride monohydrate).

I urge you to discuss the important and troubling issue of illegal drug, prescription medicine and alcohol use with your child. You can be the most compelling influence in this equation. Do not underestimate your ability to connect with your child in a profound way. I invite you to contact me with your thoughts and concerns so that I can share them with our staff as we continue to look for ways to keep our students safe. We will continue to use candor and sensitivity as we drive home the message that we will not tolerate any of our students using illegal drugs or abusing prescription medicines on campus or at school sponsored events.

Please read on. The article below, written by Diana Traficante, an active member of our PFC, describes "Alcopops," an alcoholic beverage that can be confused with an energy drink. Her article underscores the important role parents play in keeping our young people safe. Please also explore the links on this page as well as the resources listed on our newly expanded "Hotlines & Help Groups" web page at www.ophs.opusd.k12.ca.us/personal_counseling.htm.

- Lynn McCormack, OPHS Principal

Alcopops

Alcoholic Energy Drinks - New Fuel to the Underage Drinking Epidemic

Look Closely, Labels are Similar to Regular Energy Drinks!

"Alcopops", according to Chris Albrecht of the state's Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) office in Ventura County, is the new term that describes energy drinks mixed with alcohol. Their consumption by minors is a growing concern. Now being sold at local grocery and convenience stores in Ventura County, these alcoholic beverages are often placed near the traditional (non-alcoholic) energy drinks. Worse, they often feature similar packaging and are marked as alcohol only by small phrases on the label such as "malt beverage" or "alc/vol." This is a serious matter. Imagine a worker on a lunch break or a college student dashing into a store to buy an energy drink to get him or her "through" the afternoon. If they purchase one of these poorly labeled energy drinks that contain alcohol and take a big swig on

their way back to the car, they will now be driving impaired. Now think about your child, knowingly or unknowingly purchasing one of these energy drinks and the effect it might have on his/her daily activities. The result could be devastating. Your child could be in the classroom, driving, or playing sports while impaired. What if the impaired child was not your child, but the one on the bottom row of a cheerleading pyramid, or working next to your child in wood shop, or handling chemicals in a group science lab activity? Think about it...

I questioned Mr. Albrecht about how we can prevent these drinks from being sold to our kids. He explained to me that the ABC Act has labeling requirements, but the labels are not always clear. Currently there is legislation in Sacramento requiring the labels of these drinks to more clearly identify the versions that contain alcohol. Energy drinks typically have names that appeal to kids and the alcoholic version is often sold on or near the same shelf as the non-alcoholic energy drink, making it easy to mistake one for the other. Take a quick glance at the photo below, can you discern the alcoholic drinks from the traditional energy drinks?

Technically you do have to be 21 years old to purchase these alcoholic beverages, but frankly, many store owners or clerks are not even aware that these "alcopops" contain high levels of alcohol, so the drinks are easily obtained by children and teens. A store owner or employee would be liable and sanctioned if they sold these drinks to underage consumers. The ABC has a "minor decoy program" which monitors the selling practices of alcohol by store owners. If you suspect a store owner is selling alcohol of any kind to teens, please call and report your suspicions to Mr. Albrecht at the Alcohol Beverage Control office at (805) 289-0002.

- *Diana Traficante*

Helpful and informative websites:

Reading Material:

Tips for Parents: Underage Drinking in California - What Can You Do? Provided by the California Governor's Prevention Advisory Council Underage Drinking Prevention Workgroup.

Available at the SafeState.org website, in the Focus Area of Drug and Alcohol Abuse:

<http://safestate.org/index.cfm?navId=441>

Check out the statistics and details listed on this page, too.

"Schools Use Breathalyzers to Fight Teen Drinking" USA

Today, October 16, 2007. A recent "call to action" effort against student drinking.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-10-15-Breathalyzer_N.htm?csp=34&loc=interstitialskip

Alcopops - New Report by The Marin Institute:

http://www.marininstitute.org/alcopops/energy_drink_report.htm

Multimedia:

Teen Drinking Public Service Announcements (PSA) featured online for parents. Click on any of the "Know About It" or "Talk About It" photos/topics.

<http://web.venturacountystar.com/special/2007/06/teendrinking/teendrinking.html>

Reality Parties for Parents

Recently, Oak Park High School's PFC, along with Straight Up Ventura County, sponsored a **Reality Party**. Reality Parties for Parents increase awareness and understanding of the dangerous culture of local teen drinking parties. If you haven't attended a Reality Party yet, take a few minutes to watch the three-minute promo video created by Straight Up Youth. You can also see two local news segments about these events. Visit the Straight Up You Tube channel where six video pieces by or about Straight Up are available. Note that two Oak Park students participated in a recent Reality Party and are prominent in the video.

<http://youtube.com/straightupvc>

Straight Up Ventura County

Straight Up is a youth development project that promotes social change regarding underage and binge drinking among 15 to 25 year olds in Ventura County using improvisation and interactive performance/workshops with engaging discussion, exploration of issues, and the development of personal and community solutions to these problems. Check it out.

<http://www.straightupvc.org/>

Ventura County Limits

Ventura County is embarking on a bold new countywide initiative to reduce underage and binge drinking. This is in response to growing public concern over the impact of alcohol on the lives of young people, and the alarming rates of binge-level drinking in the 15 to 25 age group in Ventura County. Learn more about this Community Partnership for Responsible Alcohol Policies & Practices.

<http://www.venturacountylimits.org/>