

Hudson Star-Observer

Your online link to Hudson, Wisconsin

Wisconsin's drinking problem tops in nation

RiverTown Newspaper Group - 09/19/2007

Wisconsin tops the nation in alcohol use among both teenagers and adults, according to a report issued Monday by the University of Wisconsin.

Consequently, the report found that 41 percent of auto fatalities in the state between 1996-05 were alcohol-related -- higher than the national rate.

According to the report, in 2005 there were 369 alcohol-related traffic fatalities in the state which was up from 325 in 1996. The ages most often to be involved were 16-34-year-olds.

The report, by the UW-Madison Population Health Institute, found that Wisconsin adults have the highest rates in the nation of both binge drinking and heavy drinking.

The report classifies binge drinking as five or more drinks on one occasion and heavy drinking as more than 60 drinks in one month for men and 30 for women.

One positive finding in the report was that Wisconsinites used illicit drugs at a rate equal to or less than the national average.

"Clearly, risky alcohol use far surpasses drug use in Wisconsin," said Paul Moberg, Ph.D., who directed the study.

Men were more likely to die from use illicit drugs while blacks were more than three times as likely to die from drug use, according to the report.

In announcing the report Moberg said that the high alcohol use is costing the state in a variety of ways.

"Our high rates of heavy drinking and binge drinking affect the well-being of every resident," Moberg said.

"Families, communities, businesses and educational institutions experience the impact of unhealthy alcohol use through costs to our health and criminal justice systems as well as direct effects on individual health, injuries, productivity and interpersonal relationships," he added.

From 1996-04 arrests in Wisconsin for liquor law violations was three times the national average, while disorderly conduct arrests were five times higher.

The report found that approximately 23 percent of all sexual assaults and 30 percent of physical assaults in the state were alcohol-related.

The rate of drug arrests in Wisconsin from 1996-05 was higher than the national average with juveniles having the highest rates. Arrests for marijuana were the highest at 62 percent of all drug arrests.

Along with UW-Madison the report was compiled by Wisconsin State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup. The organizations are working together to analyze the consequence and consumption patterns of alcohol and illicit drug use in Wisconsin.