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## Underage drinking is not a minor problem

Stanton, MI~ Statistics show that youth continue to give in to the temptation of alcohol, making it the most commonly used and abused drug among youth in the United States, more than tobacco and illicit drugs.

According to a recent student survey:

- Over 28% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders and over 15% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders in Montcalm County admitted to binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks during a short period of time) during the last 30 days.
- Over 20% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders (14 to 15 year-olds) had their first drink of alcohol at an average of 12 ½ years of age
- 18% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders (12 to 13 year-olds) had their first drink of alcohol at an average of less than 10 years of age.

This continued widespread use of alcohol by area youth led to the formation of the Montcalm Coalition to Prevent Underage Drinking (MCPUD) in March 2008. MCPUD consists of representatives from various organizations and businesses and is committed to reducing the consumption of alcohol and related problems experienced by youth throughout the county.

The mission of MCPUD is to organize and focus resources to lower the use of alcohol and decrease related consequences linked to underage youth in Montcalm County. The group's focus areas for 2009 include:

- Increase awareness and education
- Enhance community commitment
- Limit access
- Offer fun and healthy activities
- Develop positive support systems
- Promote enforcement emphasis

“The point we'd like to drive home is that underage drinking is not a minor problem,” said Kimberly Singh, Health Officer for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) and MCPUD Member. “We are hopeful that we can change attitudes surrounding underage drinking and how the community views underage drinking as a whole.”

According to MCPUD, underage drinking is a community issue and to make a lasting difference all citizens, parents, youth, governmental agencies, public and private institutions, businesses and workplaces, hospitals, schools, churches, and civic organizations are called upon to step forward to do their part.

Greenville High School's SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving) Chapter hosted MCPUD's April meeting at the Greenville High School. The main topic of conversation was how MCPUD can best communicate with youth. All agreed that technology will play a key role through social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and My Space.

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MCPUDs message can also be seen on billboards within Montcalm County that read *28% blitzed... time to talk*. The message the group is trying to convey is that 28% of our Montcalm County 11<sup>th</sup> graders are drinking five or more alcoholic drinks in a row within the past 30 days with the sole purpose of getting drunk.

MCPUD meets the fourth Friday of every month from 9:00 a.m. to 11 a.m. (please refer to [www.mcpud.org](http://www.mcpud.org) for meeting locations). Anyone interested in reducing underage drinking is encouraged to attend.

For more information, please contact MCPUD at 989-831-4591 or [info@mcpud.org](mailto:info@mcpud.org) or visit [www.mcpud.org](http://www.mcpud.org).

*Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.*

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