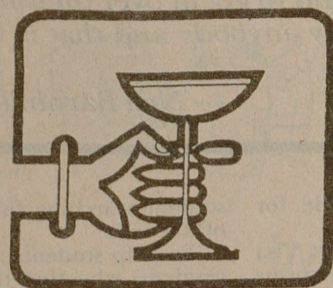


Program advocates responsible drinking

Health Center gives students, organizations tips on safe party planning

By Juliette Rizzo
Staff Writer



The Center for Drug Prevention and Education gives a new meaning to the word PARTY — Planning parties with Alcohol Moderation and Responsibility — That's up to You!

Ann Coombes, assistant coordinator of the Center for Drug Prevention and Education in the A.P. Beutel Health Center, said that many students do not realize the extent of the risks and liabilities involved in drinking and giving parties.

"Our goal is to make all students aware of the risks and responsibilities involved with drinking," Coombes said. "Most students don't realize that they can be held individually liable for their actions when they are intoxicated."

The center is responsible for giving responsible party-planning advice to recognized student organizations including academic clubs, fraternities and sororities.

Programs are being developed across the country to increase students' drug and alcohol awareness and to promote responsible partying.

The PARTY program, started in January, is funded by a federal grant. The government had mandated that federal financial aid would be withheld from universities that did not provide students with an alcohol and drug awareness program.

A&M's program provides brochures, counseling, programs and other resource information about responsible party plan-

ning and helping the problem drinker. "Individuals who have private parties or organizational parties where liquor is being served fail to realize that they can be held individually liable in the case of an alcohol related accident involving anyone who attends their parties," Coombes said.

"Our office provides information on how to plan parties responsibly. We are a resource center rather than a preacher in a pulpit."

Coombes said alcohol abuse on campus is high, especially in consideration of the number of students legally old enough to drink.

"Our office stresses responsible party planning which includes monitoring who is of drinking age, and with football season upon us, now is definitely the time to start practicing responsible partying," she said.

"To many, football season brings people closer together and makes drinking socially acceptable."

According to The Guide to Responsible Party Planning distributed by the center, the purpose of a party should be "togetherness, not tipsiness." The guide lists some responsible party planning tips:

- Drinking should not be the primary focus of any activity.
- Individuals sponsoring the event should implement precautionary measures to ensure that alcoholic beverages are not accessible or served to persons under the legal drinking age or to persons who appear intoxicated.
- At social functions where alcoholic beverages are provided by a sponsoring organization, direct access should be limited to a person designated as the server.
- Servers at organizational parties such as fraternity parties should be older, respected members," Coombes said. "Fraternities are notorious for having their younger pledges act as bartenders. Older members don't take them seriously when they ask for identification for them to drink."
- Promotional materials including advertising for any event should not make reference to the amount of alcoholic beverages (such as the number of beer kegs) available.
- A reasonable portion of the party budget should be designated for the purchase of food items.

Coombes said high-protein foods help slow the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream. "Salty foods should not be served because they may enhance people's thirst."

Appropriate non-alcoholic beverages should be available at the same place as the alcoholic beverages and featured as prominently as the alcoholic beverages.

"Guests who don't drink should not be embarrassed by having to drink out of 'different' glasses," she said.

Alcoholic beverages must not be provided as awards, door prizes or give-aways to individual students attending student organization functions.

Coombes said that people don't get together to eat and drink, but to be in the company of friends.

"Eating and drinking are important, because they help people have more fun, not because they supply the fun."

She said that students must realize that all members of the Texas A&M community are subject to Texas' alcoholic beverage laws.

The consumption and possession of alcoholic beverages in a public place after 1:15 a.m. is prohibited by city ordinances. Consumption after hours is a misdemeanor offense.

The city ordinances state that an individual should not possess any container holding any alcoholic beverage in any public place after hours. A "public place" includes streets, parking lots and any establishment open to the public as well as the yards of fraternity and sorority houses.

Coombes said that if responsible-party-

ing tips are not taken seriously and a person attending an event is injured in an alcohol-related accident, the individual or organization sponsoring the party can be held liable.

To be protected from the "social host" liability, Coombes says, the host should make sure no one under 21 is served liquor and that several people at the party abstain from drinking to provide safe transportation for others.

If a person does become intoxicated at a sponsored function, Coombes said, the sponsoring organization should take the responsibility of ensuring that person gets home safely with a designated non-drinking driver.

Intoxicated individuals should be kept still and comfortable while someone monitors their breathing, she said.

"Someone should always stay with the drunk person so he won't hurt himself or attempt to drive," she said. "The intoxicated individual should be permitted to sleep and not be given anything to eat so as not to induce vomiting."

"The person should never be given a cold shower--the shock can cause the person to pass out."

Coombes said the party guidelines were developed primarily to help student groups plan and enjoy good, safe parties and social events.

"With adequate planning and responsible actions we can prevent potential problems and liabilities and provide for the safety and well-being of our guests," she said.

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