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Easthampton package stores, bars pass underage compliance checks

By **CATHERINE BAUM**
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EASTHAMPTON - Underage drinkers looking to buy alcohol would be better off not trying to do so in this city.

All 27 city bars, restaurants and package stores passed recent compliance checks for not selling alcohol to minors - with flying colors.

"Each establishment asked what they should have," said School Resource Officer Alan Schadel.

This is the second consecutive year Easthampton tested perfectly, a marked improvement from a similar check conducted in January 2008 when 50 percent of the places visited were cited for selling to underage youth.

Schadel accompanied four teenagers Friday night to perform the checks, commonly known as stings. Students asked to be served alcohol, he said, and when they were asked for identification they replied they didn't have any and walked out the door.

Teen participants are recruited from out of town so store clerks and bartenders won't recognize them, said Heather Warner, prevention specialist for the Strategic Planning For Families and Youth coalition at Hampshire Educational Collaborative. The coalition funded the compliance checks through grants to support a culture in which underage drinking is unacceptable, according to Susan Cairn, coalition director.

"There's a lot of evidence that says regularly scheduled compliance checks in communities reduce the rate of sales to young people," Warner said.

In another effort to prevent underage drinking, a half dozen Easthampton High School students visited city package stores Monday to carry out "Sticker Shock," which is a part of the Mother's Against Drunk Driving campaign. Students posted stickers on wine coolers and beer packages that read "Hey You! It is illegal to provide alcohol for people under 21" at Jim's Package Store, Old Colony Package Store and Ferry Street Package Store.

A 2009 survey of Hampshire County teens reveals 25 percent of teens get their alcohol from either someone they know or a stranger over age 21 who agreed to buy it for them.

Harry Patel, owner of Jim's Package Store, said while he always checks for identification, the stickers will make people think twice about purchasing alcohol for minors.

"Underage drinking is an issue here," Patel said as he pulled out a complaint that noted a 15-year-old

1 2 3 4



GORDON DANIELS

While Amy Warren of Hampshire Educational Collaborative, at right, looks on, EHS freshman Paige Czarnik, 14, places warning sticker on 12-packs of beer in the back of the cooler



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boy stole a bottle of liquor from the store last week.

"By getting out there and doing something proactive they see themselves as taking steps to increase awareness around underage drinking," said Nancy Dunn, club adviser of Students Against Destructive Decisions. The students who participated in "Sticker Shock" Monday are members of the club.

Schadel said he believes the sticker shock campaign is effective, although he noted there is no real way to measure its effectiveness.

"The statistics are unknown," Schadel said. "Even if it only changes one person's decision, that's a decision that could change a life."

Manual Morales, a sophomore at Easthampton High, said he too believes the group's work Monday will prevent underage drinking.

"What we're doing is probably the best thing we can right now because we're minors," Morales said as he stuck a sticker to a container in Jim's Package Store.

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