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## **Council approves social host ordinance to crack down on underage drinking**

*Property owners will be held liable*

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### **Council approves Social Host Ordinance**

EL PASO, Texas - City Council Tuesday approved a civil social host ordinance making it illegal to provide an environment where underage drinking takes place, regardless of who provides the alcohol.

Police officers arriving at parties where alcohol is being served to minors say it can be difficult to determine who is responsible. With social host liability, the focus will shift to where the drinking takes place. Police said the person who provided the alcohol will also be held accountable, but in some cases, it is difficult to track that person down.

There will be a 180 day grace period before the ordinance goes into effect.

City Rep. Michael Noe was an early supporter of the ordinance. "Instead of trying to prove who bought the liquor, just say the person whose property they are on is responsible," Noe said. "So if you have a house party at your home and you get caught, your parents are going to be responsible whether they bought you the liquor or not."

An adult who violates the ordinance can be fined up to \$250 for a first offense and \$500 for a second.

If it is a juvenile in violation, the juvenile and his/her parents or guardians will be jointly liable for the violation.

For a first violation, where a parent or guardian is not present at the home or other private property, a written warning will be issued.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving, or MADD, said private homes are the most common setting for drinking among high school seniors.

Underage drinking is a major problem in El Paso, according to a new report by The Paso Del Norte Health Foundation.

It found 28% of high school freshman reported drinking alcohol in the past 30 days and about 17% reported binge drinking, or having five or more drinks in a row on one occasion.

Some reported being in a car with a driver who had been drinking, while one in four said they had driven after drinking alcohol.

Dr. David Jernigan, an associate professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, was the primary author of the study. Dr. Jernigan said alcohol is the "drug of choice" in El Paso. "What we found is that El Paso is slightly above the national average," he said.

Jernigan said underage drinking statistics have fallen in recent year nationwide.

"We're very concerned that this is still the leading drug problem among young people," said Jernigan.

The study said young people who are exposed to underage drinking are likely to engage in sexual intercourse, unintentionally get pregnant, suicide and car wrecks.

Many times, Jernigan said it is adults who are providing teens with alcohol thinking they'll be safer drinking at home.

"In the first place, they're not safer and in the second place you're making decisions for somebody else's children as well," said Jernigan.

Jernigan said it is a national solution to curb underage drinking.

Earlier this year, city council directed the city manager to bring them a law that holds adults accountable when they provide alcohol to minors or host gatherings where underage drinking is happening.