



# Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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## Steady Increases in Enforcement Yield Welcome Results

Vigorous compliance check investigations have proven to be highly successful in limiting the availability of alcohol from retail establishments to underage youth in the Omaha metropolitan area. Between 1997 and 2004, noncompliance rates dropped from 41 percent to less than 10 percent. The partnership between Project Extra Mile (PEM), a locally based community coalition, and enforcement has made this compliance check investigation program a success in Nebraska.

When PEM began in 1995, one of its early goals was to increase enforcement of the State's youth alcohol laws as part of their larger, comprehensive effort. PEM first made contact with law enforcement agencies in the metropolitan Omaha area. As these partnerships grew, so did the effectiveness of the community to encourage increased enforcement.

The PEM coalition was responsible for garnering media attention that generated additional community support for the enforcement efforts. They accomplished this by asking law enforcement officers to serve as spokespersons, preparing media alerts, providing opportunities for media involvement through police ride-alongs, doing pitch calls, writing and disseminating news releases, and holding news conferences.

These efforts increased the community's awareness of law enforcement efforts and its support for these efforts. With the community behind them, PEM and the enforcement community moved forward in their collaborative efforts to increase enforcement.

Actual increased enforcement efforts began in February 1997. These efforts involved the participation of seven local police departments, two county sheriffs' departments, and the Nebraska State Patrol. Fred Zwonechek, Administrator for the Nebraska Office of Highway Safety, has been a key partner in the enforcement efforts through his leadership and confidence in the coalition's work. The Office provided overtime grant money to agencies that requested help with the increased agency commitment.

Over the past 9 years, PEM has grown from just two staff people providing administrative support for the initiatives to much more. Staff now coordinates all media efforts, recruits and coordinates youth to serve as minor decoys during enforcement operations, and collects and monitors all enforcement reports following operations both for tracking purposes and for transmission to the State Liquor Control Commissions. To date, data have been collected on more than 3,500 alcohol compliance checks in the Omaha metropolitan area. PEM staff also has prepared youth to testify before the Commission.

**Our Point:**  
**Communities, institutions, and States are successfully changing laws, ordinances, and policies to reduce underage drinking.**

One of the critical successes of PEM is that law enforcement sees the organization as a valuable and trusted partner committed to long-term change. Law enforcement often sees too many flash-in-the-pan community efforts with transient leadership. PEM, however, has provided stability and steady progress to addressing the problem effectively, which has given law enforcement confidence in the coalition.

PEM continues to support law enforcement efforts and has expanded the compliance check operations across the State through collaboration with local law enforcement and the local PEM community coalitions (coalitions currently cover 10 counties in the State). PEM also plans to continue compliance checks locally within the Omaha community, while adding additional enforcement operations. These additional operations will include such efforts as sobriety checkpoints and shoulder taps. Additionally, this spring/summer PEM helped coordinate a 7-week effort that included multiple nights of compliance checks and nearly a dozen nights of selective patrols targeting such events as recent graduation nights and other end-of-the-year events at area schools and colleges.

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