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Enrollment figures

By **Judy Powell**/ News Correspondent
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Alcohol abuse among teenagers at local home parties is growing, says School Committee member Bruce Tretter, and that's exactly why he wants parents to join the Home Safety Network.

At this week's meeting, the School Committee member outlined the network's background and goals, aiming to help parents connect with each other to keep students safe.

Based on the "Safe Homes" national model, the program has 70 members from Northborough, Southborough and Westborough.

Tretter, along with Anne Taggart of Northborough and Westborough mother Judy Wilchynski, would like to see the membership grow while educating parents to be good role models.

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"This problem won't go away without a cultural change by parents and students," he said.







Underscoring the issue, Tretter cited a Youth Risk Behavior Study given anonymously to high school students last year.

It revealed nearly half of the population, or 45 percent, used alcohol within 30 days of the survey. Another 22 percent said they had smoked marijuana during the same time period.

"This is an increase from the 2003-2004," he said. "The problem is real. It runs through the fabric of the community."

Tretter quoted from recent news

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stories where local parents were cited by police for allowing alcohol to be consumed by minors at their homes.

"This is just the tip of the iceberg," he explained. "Not all incidences are reported."

Taggart, who brought the Home Safety Network idea forward in Northborough two years ago, said part of their mission is to educate parents about the Social Host Law.

"Some parents believe their kids will drink anyway so they provide it at home thinking their child will be safe," she explained. "When you think in those terms you are not only making a choice for your child, but for someone else's child, too."

"It's not only wrong," she continued. "It's against the law. You may be at risk of losing your house if someone sues."

School Committee members Rod Jané and Craig Harris suggested the Social Host Law be explained in front of parents at both the middle and high school open houses since ignorance may be as big a problem as irresponsibility.

By raising awareness in parents, the network also aims to change the drinking culture among adults who preach abstinence to teenagers with a beer in their hands.

"We want to help avoid the 'do as I say, not as I do' scenario," said Wilchynski.

With a \$10,000 fund-raising goal, the network needs money for speakers, workshops and mailings.

"Right now we have no budget, but hope to receive money from rotary clubs and civic groups in the area," she said.

Parents interested in joining the network must pledge to support community efforts to provide a safe environment for teens to socialize.

"We are trying to help families connect with each other so they can feel safe sending their kids to home parties, and so their kids aren't faced with a choice about whether to drink or not," explained Wilchynski. [\[continue\]](#)

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