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## Official: No figure trends for alcohol-related arrests

By D.L. Horton

Since July 19, 1980, the drinking age in Nebraska has been 20. Has that change caused any decrease in the number of high school, junior high and college alcohol-related arrests and accidents?

Fred Zwonechek, administrator of the Nebraska Office of Highway Safety, said changing the drinking age does not have a direct effect on the number of people arrested in Nebraska for DWI and involved in alcohol-related traffic accidents.

However, he said a study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety showed states that raised their drinking age recorded a 20 percent reduction in the number of traffic deaths involving alcohol.

The number of adults - 18 and over - arrested by Lincoln police for driving while intoxicated decreased slightly in 1980 with 1,759 arrests compared to 1,937 in 1979.

Of these arrests, 14 percent were involved in accidents in 1979 and 18 percent in 1980. The 20 to 24 age group has consistently had the most arrests. The arrest figure for 1979 was 690 and 592 in 1980.

Lt. Jerry Smith said the police department is averaging 159 alcohol-related arrests each month, for a total of 1,275 so far this year.

Juvenile - 17 and under - alcohol-related arrests for 1981 through August were 125. This is up from 1979's figure of 113. DWI arrests through August for 1981 were 46. In 1979 there were 59 for the juvenile group.

Statewide figures for alcohol-related arrests were 1,733 in 1980 and 318 DWI arrests, according to the Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice.

1981 figures were not available. In 1979 the figures were 1,768 with 332 DWI's.

The maximum penalty for minor in possession, attempting to purchase alcohol while under age, and buying for a minor, is three months in jail and/or a \$500 fine. There is no minimum penalty.

Lt. Smith said from the majority of reports he has seen the adults arrested are not college students.

Zwonechek said his office concentrates on educating teens on the effects of alcohol. It recognizes teens are going to drink even though it is illegal, and tries to stress responsible drinking.

Zwonechek said he will be working with the Governor's Traffic Safety Council, researching why drinking and driving is the number one killer of people under 25. He said the council will also look at inconsistencies in the way alcohol violations are treated and suggest appropriate legislation to correct them. Zwonechek said the governor has promised to support the council's findings and suggestions.

Zwonechek said although the problem is a continuous one, part of the reason for raising the age was to make it more difficult for teens to acquire liquor. He said the law assumes that because of an age difference of several years, fewer teens will know a 20-year-old that would be willing to buy liquor for them.

Counselors and administrators of Lincoln junior highs and high schools said they had not seen a change in the number of students who seek help on alcohol concerns.

Diane Leggiadro of Lincoln High, and Dennis Tinsley of Lincoln Southeast said they have noticed no change in the number of students seeking alcohol counseling.

Tinsley said because high school-age students have never been able to drink legally the change hasn't greatly affected them. He said the degree of help a student wants depends on the student, and Tinsley will refer students who feel they have a serious problem to other alcohol counseling such as Alcoholics Anonymous.

Charles Jones, assistant principal of Lincoln High, said only two or three students during the last three or four years have been referred to him with alcohol problems. He said this is because of a general change in the attitudes and mores of young people.

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