

Backgrounder: The Tampa Alcohol Coalition



*Advance Public Relations
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Who is the TAC?

The Tampa Alcohol Coalition, TAC, is a non-profit organization that is determined to prevent and reduce underage drinking, high-risk or binge drinking, and DUI's in Hillsborough County. Hillsborough County leads the state in crashes, injuries and fatalities that are alcohol related. Founded in 2001, the TAC is making a stand and working to get results that will move Hillsborough County statistics down away from alarming levels. The Tampa Alcohol Coalition is located at 521 Lantern Circle in Temple Terrace.

History, Mission, and Structure

In September 2001, Hillsborough County's underage drinking and alcohol-related fatality statistics were of major concern. This led the Hillsborough County Anti-Drug Alliance to create the Hillsborough County Anti-Drug and Alcohol Prevention Task Force. The organization changed its name in 2004 to the Tampa Alcohol Coalition to reflect more focus on underage drinking, high-risk drinking and DUI issues.

The main goals of the TAC are first, to increase the awareness of agencies, organizations and government officials about the consequences and costs of underage drinking and high risk drinking in our community. Second, the TAC wants to promote community support of current alcohol policies and laws. Third, the TAC seeks to motivate key organizations, agencies, media and officials to join in their efforts. And, finally, they are seeking community support for new alcohol policies and laws.

Research-based prevention programs are what keep the organization in motion. Research performed by the Hillsborough County Anti-Drug Alliance suggests that

alcohol is a leading drug abused by adolescents and adults. These statistics also suggest that alcohol is often associated with many crimes, including vehicle accidents, violence, drowning, sexual assault and more. This knowledge has been used to develop a variety of successful projects, including a city ordinance curfew agreement with Ybor on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

The Governor's Office of Drug Control granted the TAC \$60,000 this year. This is a major donation that is combined with several other smaller ones that keep the TAC working. The money is used to support law enforcement toward underage drinking and environmental alcohol prevention training, among other efforts. Other grants that were sought out include the Alcohol Block Grant for \$52,000, a Florida State University mini-grant and a youth training grant.

The TAC is comprised of many key organizations and officials throughout Hillsborough County and is lead by co-chairwomen, Ellen Snelling and Sue Carrington. The State's Attorney Office, law enforcement agencies, Juvenile Drug Court, Mother's Against Drunk Driving, treatment facilities, Hillsborough County Schools, bars, and other concerned parties meet on the third Tuesday of every month at 3 p.m. in the Tampa Police Department at 9330 N. 30th Street. A monthly newsletter and email alerts with alcohol prevention updates keep members informed and active within the organization. The organization always welcomes new members, and has grown to over 100 parents and community members.

Respectively, there are three committees that comprise the TAC - Education, Law Enforcement and Public Policy. The Education Committee is who promotes alcohol/drug free events for underage people, works with the media and designs prevention ads. The

Law Enforcement Committee, or Intervention Committee as it is sometimes referred to, is responsible for the diversion programs used for young people who are arrested for using fake identification to be served. Finally, the Public Policy Committee is the team that investigates and acts to restrict the drink specials at local bars that often draw in the younger patrons. This team also works to divert bars away from marketing to college students who are under the age of 21.

The TAC is still in the developmental stages, working towards making big differences. However, there are some big headlines that it has made. Local news outlets have reported on the TAC's involvement in the opposition to the Bucs' free beer promotions and curbing teen drinking in Ybor. The TAC supported and pushed for an ordinance enforcing a curfew, proving that the Tampa Alcohol Coalition is making a difference in the community. Some key goals for the year include expanding the organization's coverage and making itself and its purpose known. This includes a public relations campaign with a logo design, letterhead, news releases, and other materials that will be completed before the year's conclusion.

In order for the mission of curbing underage drinking to be successful, community official, service providers, media outlets and youth-serving organizations must team up with an understanding of the detrimental effects of alcohol on potential customers, community members, and clients. They must also become more motivated to help to prevent and reduce alcohol abuse for their mission to be accomplished.

Environmental Pressures

The Tampa Alcohol Coalition is up against a battle that has been fought for years. Teens are often persuaded by peers to break rules and even adults can get carried into

making the wrong decisions, especially when under the influence of alcohol. These are major obstacles that the TAC must work around. Promotions and marketing from bars and other venues serving alcohol also offer challenges. The laws and policies in effect take a lot of work to both enforce and/or change if need be. All of these things must be taken into account for the TAC to accomplish its goals. Being aware of these things is the first step to its success. The TAC is researching on a continuous basis to learn what it is up against and how to make a difference.