



**MEDIA RELEASE
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Increase in teen drink driving underlines need for stronger laws

Alcohol Healthwatch says police reports of a 77 percent increase in teenage drink-driving shows our alcohol laws need a major overhaul.

Director Rebecca Williams says it's a classic case of fiddling while Rome burns.

"We have an environment where alcohol is freely available and aggressively promoted. This sustains unhealthy drinking patterns among adults who set the example for our young people. We then wonder why our young people so frequently expose themselves to risks, often with tragic consequences.

She says injury, poisoning and violence are the leading killers of our young people and alcohol is the number one contributor.

"Each of the 2229 drunk drivers processed by the Auckland Traffic Alcohol Group at checkpoints in the year to June 2009 are accidents waiting to happen."

Alcohol Healthwatch supports the return of the purchase age for alcohol to 20 years and a zero alcohol level for driving for all drivers under 20 years. Rebecca Williams believes we also need to address issues around adult drinking behaviour.

"If we just focus on young people, we are not only being hypocritical, but measures will be ineffective in the longer term. The adult population needs to lead by example and accept that if we want our young people to behave safely and responsibly around alcohol we have to change our attitudes to alcohol.

"To shift adult drinking behaviours and protect our young people from the undue influence of alcohol in their lives we need to take a number of measures. These include increasing the price of alcohol, removing alcohol advertising and sponsorship, lowering the blood alcohol concentration for driving and providing clear warnings and information on alcohol containers as well as at point of sale."

For more information:

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Action on Liquor - See www.ahw.org.nz for policy briefing papers on key liquor issues: including Warning Labels, Taxation, Sale of Liquor, Advertising, Blood Alcohol Concentration for driving and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.