

# Excess booze kills 500 Utahns

## Study: Average yearly rate is high, but lowest among 11 other states

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SALT LAKE CITY — Utah averages more than 500 deaths per year due to excessive drinking, but according to a report released this week by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the state has the lowest rate among 11 states included in a recent study.

The report highlights the collaboration among 11 states participating in the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists' Alcohol Subcommittee. In addition to Utah, participating states included California, Florida, Michigan, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Virginia and Wisconsin.

"The fact that Utah has one of the lowest rates of alcohol-attributable deaths in the nation is not a coincidence," said Brent Kelsey, Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health assistant director.

"Utah has developed an evidence-based, focused strategy to combat the negative societal effects of excess alcohol consumption.

"We believe these reasonable public policy decisions help Utah avoid many of the problems that plague other states. However ... we need to remain vigilant to save more lives and reduce costs to families and communities."

Excessive alcohol use is the fourth-leading cause of preventable death in the United States, and, in 2006, cost an estimated \$223.5 billion.

According to the report, New Mexico had the highest death rate due to excessive drinking. In Utah, there were an average 513 deaths and 15,760 years of potential life lost annually from 2006 to 2010. Nearly 73 percent of these deaths involved adults from 20 to 64.

While Utah has considerably fewer deaths than many other states, it still is too many, said Weber Human Services clinical director Jed Burton.

"We must continue to advocate for laws and policies that reduce excessive alcohol use, and we also must explore additional evidencebased practices that target prevention, especially for youth, and treatment of alcohol use," Burton said.

Weber Human Services community services director Paula Price and prevention coordinator Jennifer Hogge said underage drinking is being targeted.

"If we focus on youth, we can affect generational outcomes of alcohol addiction," Hogge said. "This focus is primarily done through the Communities That Care model, which allows for areas to target problems specific to a geographical area."

Hogge said that in the case of the Bonneville CTC, which includes Uintah, South Ogden, Washington Terrace and Riverdale, the effects of alcohol on youths is the No. 1 target of the coalition, and it is already seeing reductions in underage drinking. Results show that 40 percent of youths who use alcohol before age 15 will become alcohol dependent as an adult.

"Helping Utah's parents understand the potential for addiction and how to better interact and monitor youth, as well as dealing with individuals and entities who contribute to underage drinking during these vulnerable years, can have tremendous results," Price said. "If we can get youth to abstain from experimentation during these years when their brains are at an increased potential to form addictions, then we impact them as an adult, and the deaths will hopefully decrease from alcohol through those and other efforts."

The report also showed deaths and years of life lost are high among Native American populations. Utah had approximately 61 deaths per 100,000 population among Native American residents, compared with 22 deaths per 100,000 population among white non-Hispanics.