

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Alice Whitley

804-235-4678

**GOVERNOR AND STOP UNDERAGE DRINKING COALITION
RELEASE REPORT CARD AND PLAN TO COMBAT UNDERAGE DRINKING**

EDGARVILLE, VA — The STOP Underage Drinking Coalition and Governor Ralph Bunker today released a report card on underage drinking in the Edgarville effort.

“I applaud the efforts of this community, particularly given the significant underage drinking problem they face,” Bunker said at a 10 a.m. news conference held before an assembly of students from Edgarville High School. “Their findings confirm what is happening across this state ... young people are drinking in greater numbers at earlier ages.” Bunker cited the area’s willingness to take formal action on the problem as a model for other areas. For the past three months, the STOP Underage Drinking Coalition has been studying underage drinking in the region.

“Seventy-five percent of youth in the region have consumed alcohol and the average age of first use was 12,” said Fred Walters, the STOP Underage Drinking Coalition’s Chair and Vice President of First Savings Bank. “These findings ought to scare the daylights out of any parent of a teenager,” he said. Walters further noted the lack of effective underage drinking laws in the state. “Right now, there is no penalty for an underage youth to purchase alcohol and that is an outrage,” he said.

David Freedman, President of the Edgarville City Council, agreed. “The first action we must take is to reduce accessibility to alcohol for underage youth,” he said. “I call on the alcohol industry to join with us in making it difficult, if not impossible, for underage youth to purchase alcohol.”

In the Edgarville area, the project found 12 youth died in alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities in 1997 and 1998 and over 173 were arrested for drunk driving. Despite these numbers, the project determined there is only one alcohol beverage control agent who regulates the over 100 establishments in the area that sell alcohol. “It is no wonder only three of these establishments were cited for sales to minors violations in a two-year period,” said Walters.

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The STOP Underage Drinking Coalition has developed over 20 recommendations on ways to reduce underage drinking. The recommendations focus on three key areas: Enforcement, Prevention and Education, and Public Policy. “To change youth behavior, we must go after a young person’s most prized possession ... the driver’s license,” said David Freedman. “We currently have a law which places certain license restrictions for underage drinking offenses. Now is the time to enforce it,” he said.

Other recommendations include increased enforcement, more parental involvement and awareness, additional funding and resources to fight the problem, and more support and recognition for youth who do not use alcohol or other drugs. Blinker agreed with these recommendations and stated that as Governor he would work with the coalition and others across the state to convince all residents that underage drinking is “illegal, unhealthy and unacceptable.”