

Social Host Ordinance Overview

What is a social host ordinance?

It's a by-law that makes it illegal to provide an environment where underage drinking takes place, regardless of who provides the alcohol.

Penalties

1st Violation

Fine of \$100 + recoupment of police expenses related to the incident in the amount of \$100

2nd Violation

Fine of \$200 + recoupment of police expenses related to the incident in the amount of \$100

3rd Violation

(w/in 12-months period)
Fine of \$300

This approach aligns with our Fifth Strategy for Community Change: Changing Consequences

Who is a social host? Anyone (regardless of age, even if under the age of 21) who knowingly allows the possession or consumption of alcohol by underage drinkers on private property. This includes (but is not limited to):

- * The person(s) who owns, rents, leases, or otherwise has control of the premises where the event, gathering, or party takes place
- * The person(s) in charge of the premises or
- * The person(s) who organized the event

Does the by-law have any exclusions? Yes, the law does not prohibit you from furnishing alcohol to your own child. It also does not apply to religious ceremonies or traditions.

What is the purpose of this by-law? To prevent and discourage underage alcohol consumption.

Who will enforce the by-law? If a law enforcement officer responds to a **complaint** about an event, and through the normal course of observation and investigation they are able to determine that underage drinking or possession exists, the host or person in control of the home can be issued a citation and charged with violating the town's social host ordinance.

How is this by-law different? Violations are a civil citation. It does not change existing social host liability civil laws under which adults can be held fiscally responsible for injuries or other consequences resulting from underage drinking.



Social Host Ordinance FAQ

If I host a party where alcohol is served, how can I avoid breaking the law. Don't allow minors to drink alcohol. A host must take "reasonable steps" to prevent underage drinking.

What are considered "reasonable steps"?

- * Control Access—keep alcohol away from minors at your party
- * Control Quantity—don't buy so much you lose track of who has what
- * Verify Age—you have a responsibility to know how old everyone is at your party
- * Supervise—you must supervise the activities of minors in attendance and ensure they are not consuming alcohol

What should I do if I find underage drinkers at a party I am hosting? Ask them to stop and then contact an adult to get them home, OR you may contact the North Reading Police Department.

If youth are going to drink anyway, isn't it better to "take the keys" and provide a safe environment? No. Drunk driving is not the only negative outcome of underage drinking. Additional risks can be associated with underage drinking such as reduced inhibitions that may lead to poor decision making.

If I go away and my child hosts an underage drinking party, am I responsible?

Parents are not criminally responsible for hosting the party if they are not home and their child hosts a drinking party without their knowledge or consent. A teen or other person in control of the house could be cited criminally as well as receive a Social Host Ordinance fine. If an injury occurs as a result of alcohol consumption, a victim's family may civilly sue the host family for damages.

If my child is cited by this by-law, will it go on his/her permanent record? No. In addition, all violations involving those under the age of 18 are kept confidential.

Is there an appeals process? Yes, you can appeal the citation through the Clerk Magistrate at Woburn District Court.

