

August 8, 2008

Survey: More residents admit to binge-drinking

*Gina Tenorio
The Desert Sun*

Binge-drinking is a growing problem in eastern Riverside County.

So say the numbers put together by the Palm Desert-based Health Assessment Resource Center.

According to a recently released study, more than one in five residents of eastern Riverside County — from Calimesa to Blythe — admitted to binge-drinking at least once within the last 30 days.

The institute defined binge-drinking for men as the consumption of five or more drinks in a row. For women, the definition is consuming four or more drinks in a row.

The numbers were tallied from more than 3,500 completed household surveys.

This is the first time such a survey has been done in any area of Riverside County, agency officials said.

According to the statistics, 10 percent of those surveyed — representing some 29,000 residents — admitted to binge-drinking once over the period of a month.

The percentage of those who admitted to binge-drinking more than once in the same time frame was 13.4 percent, representing roughly 40,000 people, according to the statistics.

Despite the large area included in the survey, a bulk of those surveyed were from the Coachella Valley, said Glen Grayman, MD, director of HARC.

Of those, 2.5 percent, or about 7,673 residents, admitted driving under the influence in the last 30 days.

“Those were the people who admitted it,” said Eileen Parker, executive director for HARC. “That means the number is higher.”

Those could be viewed as stark numbers, especially to Palm Desert, which has been ranked eighth of 97 among cities of similar size for the number of fatal and injury traffic collisions. It ranked ninth out of 97 cities of similar size in the number of crashes involving alcohol.

“This is a huge issue,” Grayman said. “The issue is increasing in frequency and is connected with the increase in other problems.”

Those include assault, gunshot wounds and domestic abuse.

The chaos in the wake of binge-drinking is immense, he said.

The center released its statistics recently in part to raise awareness of the issue.

The organization was formed in 2006 by a consortium of about 35 public and private health care agencies.

It conducts a confidential community health status assessment every three years to identify major

health and quality of life issues, according an agency press release.

HARC does limited interpretations of the data. But in this case, the implications are obvious, Packer said.

“A quarter of our adult population admits to binge drinking,” she said. “That's very serious.”
