

West Hartford Police Will Use Go-Kart and Impairment Simulation Goggles to Combat Underage Drinking

By We-Ha

A grant from the Connecticut Department of Transportation Highway Safety Office is funding the West Hartford Police Department's additional equipment as well as manpower for education and enforcement to curb underage drinking.

By Ronni Newton

The West Hartford Police Department's efforts to combat underage drinking will soon get a boost thanks to a \$43,620 grant the department recently received from the Connecticut State Department of Transportation Highway Safety Office.

West Hartford has recently received other sizeable grants from the DOT, including for Click-It-Or-Ticket, Distracted Driving, and DWI Enforcement programs.

Capt. Jeff Rose learned of the underage drinking grant through a conversation with Stephen Livingston of the DOT at a MADD walk, and applied last May. "We already have a curriculum in place through our SROs [school resource officers], but this will help with our two-pronged approach of education and enforcement," said Capt. Jeff Rose who heads the Traffic Division. The West Hartford Police currently have five SROs – Leo Negron at Conard and Stacy Thomas at Hall, as well as Leigh Cogle, Irene Leonard, and Shane McAvay who share the elementary and middle schools.

The grant has funded the purchase of a pedal go-kart, cones, and a collection of impairment simulator goggles that will allow students to experience the hazards of impaired driving in a safe environment. The color-coded goggles, which along with the go-kart are manufactured by **Drunk Busters**, simulate various levels of impairment ranging from "Low Level" .06-.08 Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) to the "Totally Wasted Goggle" which simulates a BAC between .26 and .35. There is also a "Cannabis" goggle with a lens that impairs coordination and can result in nausea.

The SROs will use the go-kart and goggles in hands-on demonstrations at the schools, where a course will be set up in the gym or other large area and students will have the opportunity to see how difficult it is to "drive" properly at various levels of impairment. Students can test out the goggles by trying to catch balls while wearing them.

"It will supplement the program that we already have, but let's hope it brings their education to life," Rose said.

The program already in place, the SROs say, is even better than DARE because the curriculum is more comprehensive and continuous. "We see these kids and get to know them all the way from kindergarten through graduation," Leonard said.

In addition to the education component of go-kart and goggles, the grant will fund additional manpower to enforce underage drinking regulations. Extra patrols will be assigned to school events held in the evenings, including dances and sporting activities.

Additional detectives will also be assigned to monitor bars and restaurants in West Hartford to proactively check for underage alcohol consumption, including those who gain access to such establishments or are served using fake IDs. Stores in West Hartford that sell alcohol will also be checked, in cooperation with the Connecticut State Liquor Control Board.

"We don't want this to happen, and we hope that the increased presence is a deterrent," Rose said.

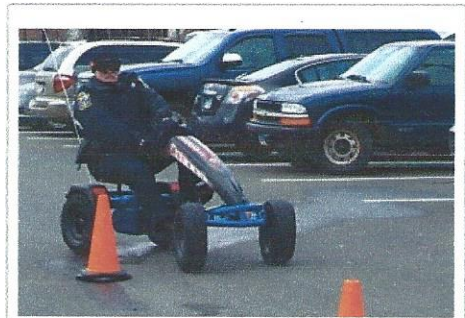
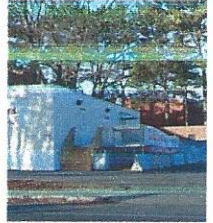
Rose shared results of a survey completed by the West Hartford Public Schools and Institute of Community Services in the fall of 2013, which indicated that 25 percent of West Hartford public high school students responding to the survey reported drinking alcohol in the past month. Of those who reported drinking in the past month, 58 percent reported that they had been "drunk" at least once, and 29 percent had been drunk at least twice.

Rose said that between Jan. 1, 2011, and July 1, 2014, there were 36 arrests of underage motorists for DWI. Eighteen of those arrests followed motor vehicle accidents, and eight of those involved a "crash where the underage motorist was drunk and evaded responsibility." There were four crashes that resulted in injury, and two involving a car crashing into a house, according to Rose.

"We have had the incidences of [drunk driving], and that's the scary part. It all starts with preventing one person from getting hurt from drinking. You may not know what you are going to prevent, but prevention is our goal," said Rose.

"The buzzword today is 'distracted driving,' but there's nothing more devastating than an accident caused by someone under the influence of drinking or drugs," Rose said.

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West Hartford Police Officer Brian Gallagher tests out the go-kart while wearing intoxication simulation goggles. Photo credit: Ronni Newton



Impairment simulation goggles manufactured by Drunk Busters include low level (blue, .06-.08 BAC) through "totally wasted" (orange, .26-.35 BAC) and the olive-strapped "cannabis" goggle. Photo credit: Ronni Newton



We-Ha.com editor Ronni Newton tests out the cannabis goggles, and reports feeling "nauseous and seeing double." Photo credit: Jeff Rose