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Why Teens, Young Adults and Bush Parties Don't Mix

Every Friday afternoon when high schools let out in Ottawa's neighbourhoods, some teens head straight for a 'Tequila Sunrise.' It's slang for the bush parties teens attend to kick off the weekend. Many young adults attend these parties too. With warmer weather upon us, we're in prime season for these off-the-beaten-track get togethers.

They take place in parks, trails, forests, private lands and green spaces throughout the city and our rural areas. What may seem like harmless 'teens being teens' to some parents comes with a range of risks. Here's what you should know:

Alcohol and drug use

There's no question that alcohol, drugs and bush parties tend to go hand-in-hand. Overconsumption of alcohol or drugs can lead to serious consequences, such as overdoses, violence or sexual assault. Bush parties take place in remote areas, so finding someone in need of emergency help can be a problem.

"The difference between an emergency and a tragedy can be a matter of minutes," explains Stittsville Councillor and Chair of the Ottawa Board of Health, Shad Qadri. "Our emergency services have to get to the victim, but when a party is taking place in a secluded area, it can be very difficult to find it. How do you identify the location? A lag in reaction time can be very serious."

Underage drinking

While some young people bring their own liquor, others have parents who supply it. It is an offense under the Liquor Licence Act for adults to supply alcohol to youth under age 19 for use in public places.

As Staff Sergeant Andrew Buchan of the Ottawa Police Service points out, parents also need to consider the worst-case scenario. "If the bush party gets out of hand to the point where someone is seriously injured or dies, the adults supplying the liquor may find themselves the subjects of a criminal investigation."

He warns that if a parent supplies liquor to a young person under age 16, and the police find out through a complaint or call for service, they will notify the Children's Aid Society.

There are also the health risks of underage drinking. Ottawa Public Health offers several fact sheets on youth drinking – and the harm it causes to a growing body and mind. In a recent study, they found that 58% of Ottawa students in grades 7 to 12 reported drinking alcohol. For more information and advice for parents, visit ottawa.ca/en/residents/public-health.

Noise and litter problems

For nearby neighbours, bush parties bring other problems, including noise and garbage. Young people may set up old sofas and chairs, build fires and leave litter scattered on the site. There is also the risk of fires from discarded cigarettes or injury from broken glass. If you notice any of these problems in your area, call the City at 3-1-1 to report the issues to By-Law.

What to do about bush parties

If you have teenagers or young adults at home, talk to them about the risks and how to make responsible choices. Encourage them to let you know where they are going, who they will be with and how you can reach them. Check up on them. You may also consider locking up your alcohol at home. Work with your kids to help them find safe ways to have fun.

If bush parties are a problem in your neighbourhood, here's what you can do:

- 1. Report a party in progress to the police:** Call 9-1-1
- 2. Report noise or litter problems to By-Law:** Dial 3-1-1
- 3. Talk to your School Resource Officer:** If you or your school-aged teen knows about a planned bush party, contact your School Resource Officer or the Ottawa Police Youth Section at 236-1222, ext. 5355 to speak with a youth officer.
- 4. Talk to your Community Police Centre officers:** For help in what to do to deal with bush party problems in your neighbourhood, call 613-236-1222 to speak with your Community Police Officer or see the full list online at ottawapolice.ca/en/contact-us/community-police-centres.asp.

As Councillor Qadri says, "People say it takes a village to raise a child. The village is made up of many parents and we all have a responsibility to keep our kids safe."

For more information about partying, alcohol or community safety, visit Crime Prevention Ottawa's Neighbourhood Toolkit at www.crimepreventionottawa.ca/toolkit.

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