

# Grand Jury reports on teen drug, alcohol use

Findings, solutions  
not supported by all

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Substance abuse and alcohol consumption among teen-agers is on the rise, according to a recently released report by the Santa Cruz County Grand Jury.

Putting together data from a school district survey, the Grand Jury concluded that use among teens in the Santa Cruz area is higher than elsewhere in the state, and that law enforcement may not be doing enough about it.

Judge Art Danner, who oversaw the Grand Jury, specially requested that it look at the county's juvenile justice system. He wanted it to look at the way juveniles involved in drug use or sale are treated and the extent to which they are asked to take responsibility for and accept the consequences of their actions.

One of the main points made by the Grand Jury was that the School Resource Officers on local campuses don't do enough to enforce drug laws and that the SROs do not get information about which students are on probation.

But law enforcement personnel disagree with those conclusions.

"In concert with the schools, the (SROs) take action on each and every one of those cases," said Watsonville Police Chief Terry Medina. Officers often work with schools, especially when the offense has to do with alcohol or marijuana. "The SROs and school administrators at Watsonville High School have a lot of communication, and cases are usually handled through school rules or a combination of different punishments."

John Rhoads, the county's chief probation officer, disagreed with the conclusion that the probation department should work more closely with local police agencies to ensure "swift and effective consequences for drug use and juvenile crime," and that the department does not give the police departments enough information about which students are on probation.

"Every kid who gets in trouble in this county meets with people and has some sort of consequences," he said. "I think we're doing what we can."

Medina said "the dialogue is very good," between Watsonville Police and the Probation Department.

"At Pajaro Valley schools, there is swift action and consequences, but I can't say how effective they are," Medina said. "They suggest to us that we should do more sur-

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veillance and investigative work to get at dealers. In the last two weeks we have met with the principal from Watsonville High School, and we plan on meeting with other principals."

Police officers have access to information about anyone, so they can check whether a student is on probation, Rhoads said.

"This hasn't been a problem in the past ... I've given them access to our computers," he said. "And we input the information into the computer as soon as we get it."