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Connecticut Underage Drinking Laws

Drinking by college students has serious consequences both to their own health and safety and to their larger college communities. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), drinking by college students aged 18 to 24 contributes to an estimated 1,825 student deaths, 599,000 student injuries, and 97,000 cases of sexual assault or date rape each year. <http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/StatsSummaries/snapshot.aspx>

As students and their parents consider the health and safety consequences of student drinking, they should also be aware of Connecticut laws concerning underage drinking and social hosting. Violations of the alcohol laws may lead to the fines and penalties noted below, as well as expose students to additional legal liability, particularly if they act as social hosts. Students who give parties, whether in off-campus houses or apartments or in their dormitory rooms, for example, are considered social hosts and they should take care to review and observe the relevant laws. A violation of these laws may have particularly serious consequences to the host if a guest is underage and becomes sick or is hurt. The laws are explained in the following summaries and links to the state statutes are provided after each summary.

Underage Drinking

- Connecticut law prohibits anyone under 21 from possessing alcohol on any public or private property. A first violation of this prohibition constitutes an infraction resulting in a \$136 fine, and each subsequent violation mandates a \$200-\$500 fine.¹
- Connecticut law prohibits misrepresenting one's age or using another person's driver's license in order to procure alcohol. Each violation mandates a \$200-\$500 fine and/or imprisonment up to 30 days.²
- Connecticut law prohibits anyone under 21 from even attempting to purchase liquor. Each violation mandates a \$200-\$500 fine.³
- Violations of any of the above prohibitions may lead to the suspension of one's driver's license or, if licensed in another state, nonresident operating privilege.⁴

Social Hosting

- Connecticut's "social hosting" law prohibits anyone from permitting people under 21 to possess alcohol in any residence or other private property. A first violation of this prohibition constitutes an infraction resulting in a \$146 fine, and each subsequent offense mandates a fine of up to \$500 and/or imprisonment up to one year.⁵

¹ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 30-89(b), < <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap545.htm>>.

² Conn. Gen. Stat. § 30-88a, < <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap545.htm>>.

³ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 30-89(a), < <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap545.htm>>.

⁴ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 14-111e(a), < <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap246.htm>>.

⁵ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 30-89a(a)-(b), < <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap545.htm>>.



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- The social hosting law prohibits hosting a party where anyone under 21 consumes alcohol even if the host does not provide the alcohol to the minors.⁶
- Permitting minors to consume alcohol on one's property violates Connecticut law even if the host is not present.⁷

Potential Consequences

- In addition to criminal penalties, social hosting or supplying alcohol to others may result in civil liability for injuries or property damage that result, including alcohol poisoning, sexual assault, or death.⁸

Other Relevant Connecticut Laws

- Connecticut law prohibits anyone from driving a motor vehicle while drinking alcohol or while under the influence of alcohol.⁹ Potential penalties for violating this prohibition include fine, imprisonment, and suspension of driver's license or nonresident operating privilege.¹⁰

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⁶ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 30-89a(a), < <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap545.htm>>.

⁷ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 30-89a(a), < <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap545.htm>>.

⁸ Ely v. Murphy, 207 Conn. 88 (1988) (father of high school student who served alcohol to minor guests at high school graduation party may be liable for damages after one intoxicated minor guest struck and killed another minor guest with his car); Vitale v. Kowal, 2006 Conn. Super. LEXIS 370 (Conn. Super. Ct. Jan. 31, 2006) (college student who served alcohol to a friend in his dorm room may be liable for damages after the friend became intoxicated and died in a car crash).

⁹ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 53a-213, < <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap952.htm>>; Conn. Gen. Stat. § 14-227a(a), < <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap248.htm>>; Conn. Gen. Stat. § 14-227g(a), <<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap248.htm>>.

¹⁰ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 53a-36, < <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap952.htm>>; Conn. Gen. Stat. § 14-227a(g), <<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/pub/chap248.htm>>.